

# CRAZY



**TOM  
MORELLO**

**SCOTT  
HEPBURN**

**DAN  
JACKSON**

KNOW YOUR ROLE







# ORCHARD™

VOLUME 3

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**DAN JACKSON**

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#### ORCHID VOLUME 3

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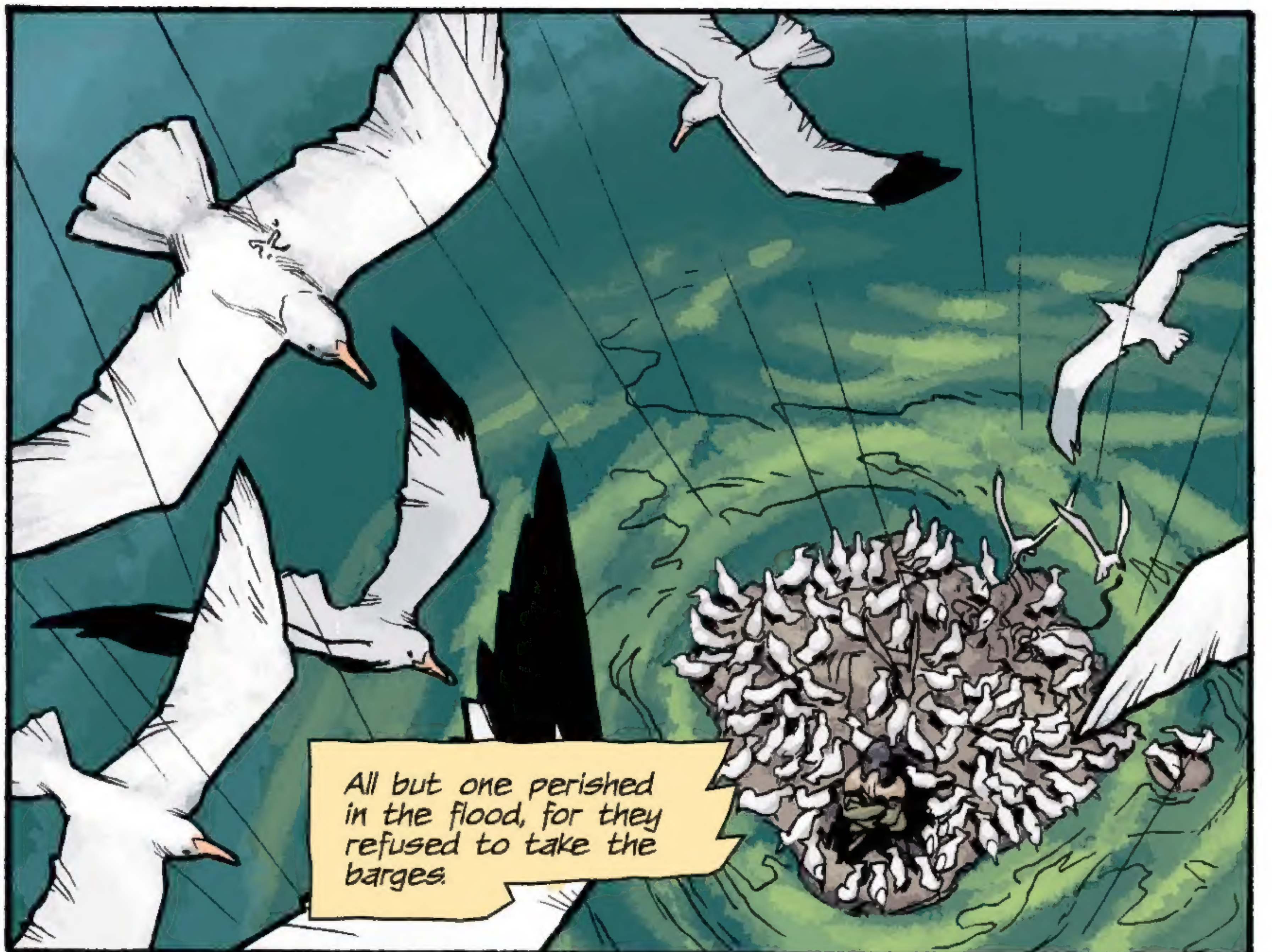


Tomorrow there may be no one left alive to tell the legend of the mask...so I will tell it here.

Centuries ago, as the floodwaters rose, a small group of liberation theologians recruited specialist warriors to send on a global mission.



And The Last Saints were born.



All but one perished in the flood, for they refused to take the barges.









As the raw tide  
swallowed the land,  
The Last Saints'  
judgments were  
harsh and unbending.



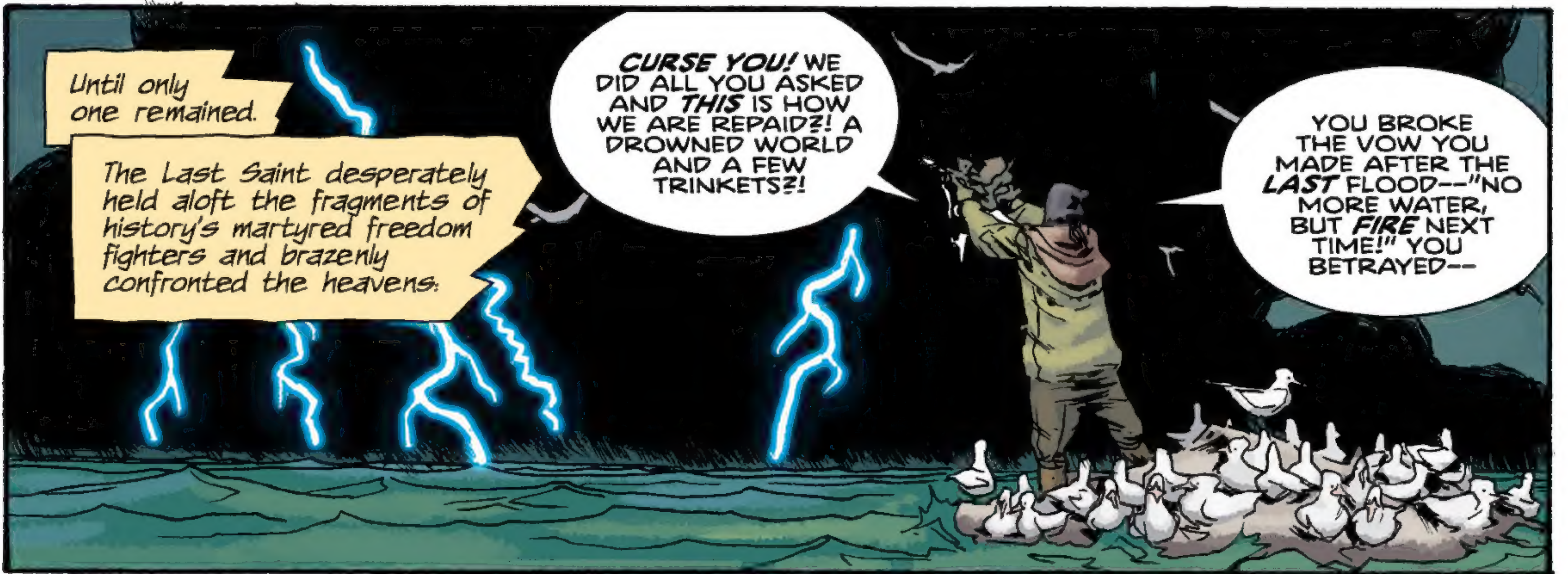
They were  
protectors  
of the poor  
and dying.



They were  
thieves and  
liberators.



They were remorseless  
avengers, unwavering in  
their calling.



Until only  
one remained.

The Last Saint desperately  
held aloft the fragments of  
history's martyred freedom  
fighters and brazenly  
confronted the heavens.

CURSE YOU! WE  
DID ALL YOU ASKED  
AND **THIS** IS HOW  
WE ARE REPAYED! A  
DROWNED WORLD  
AND A FEW  
TRINKETS?!

YOU BROKE  
THE VOW YOU  
MADE AFTER THE  
**LAST FLOOD**--"NO  
MORE WATER,  
BUT **FIRE** NEXT  
TIME!" YOU  
BETRAYED--





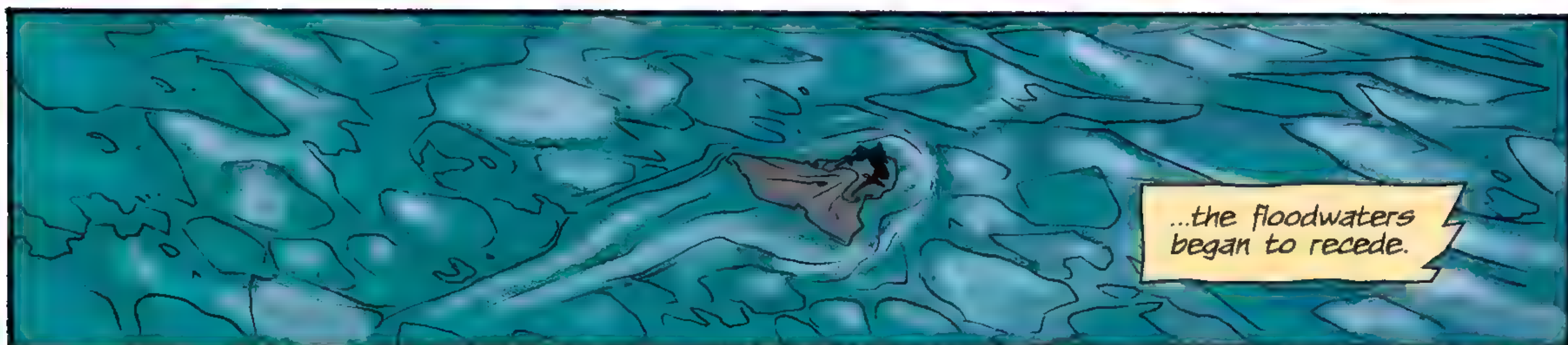
In that instant, the  
essence of mankind's  
struggle for justice--  
both peaceful and  
violent--was fused into  
the charred mask.



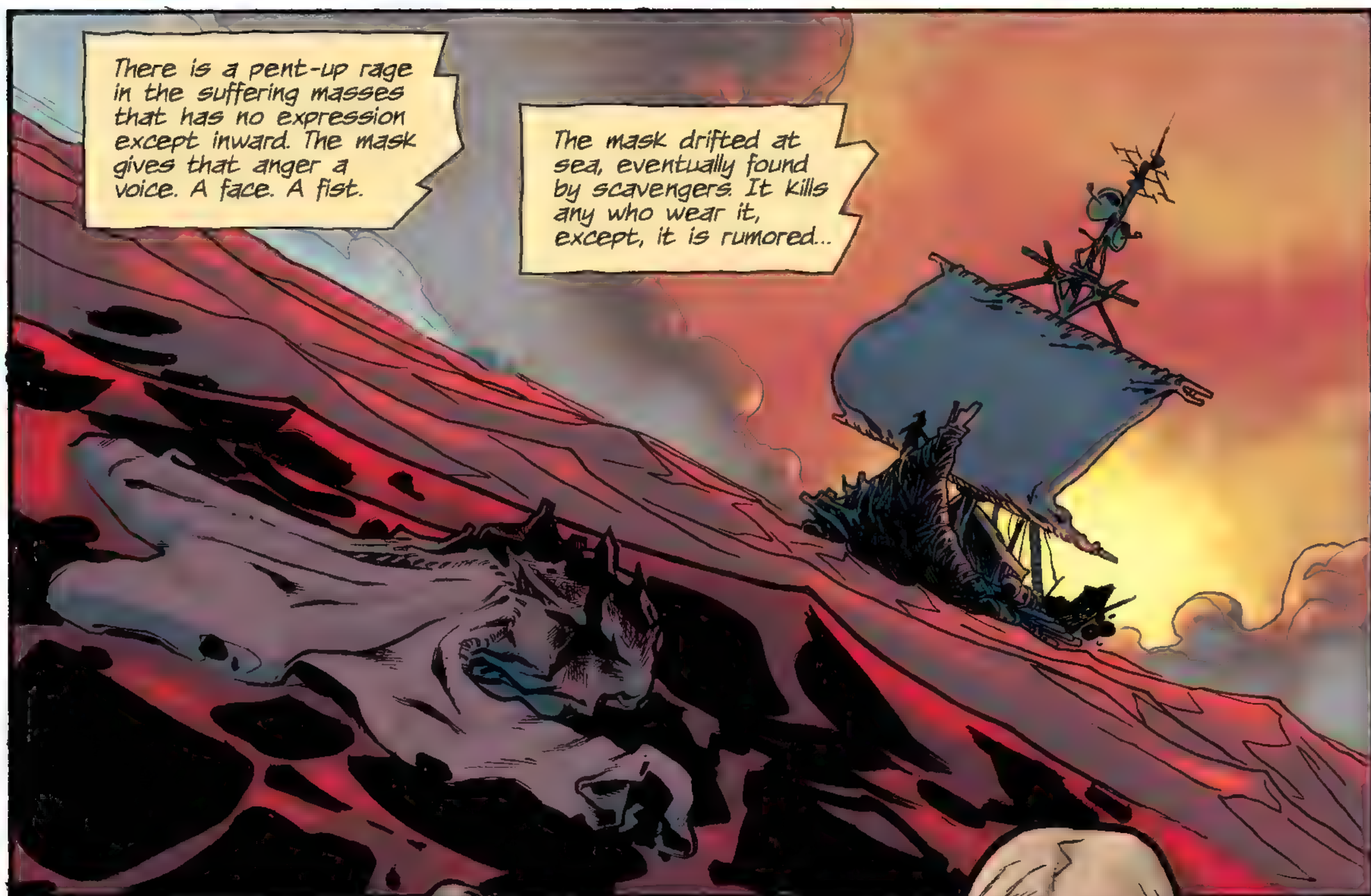




And with the sacrifice of the Last Saint...



...the floodwaters began to recede.



There is a pent-up rage in the suffering masses that has no expression except inward. The mask gives that anger a voice. A face. A fist.

The mask drifted at sea, eventually found by scavengers. It kills any who wear it, except, it is rumored...

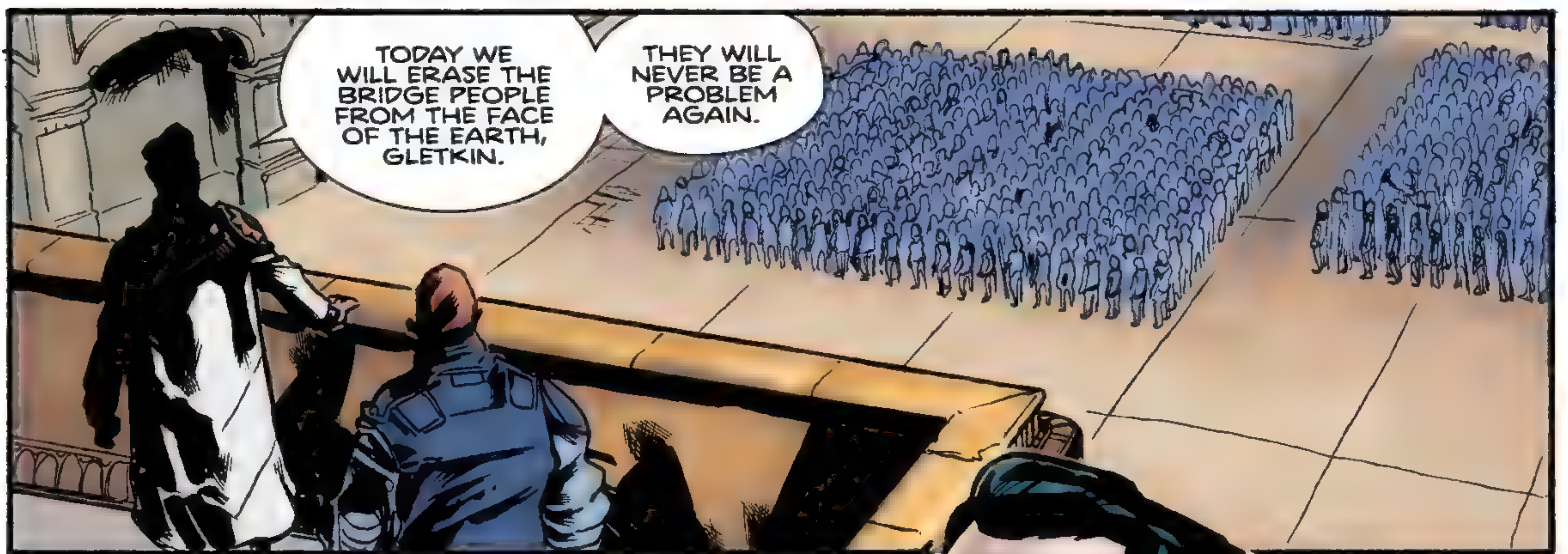
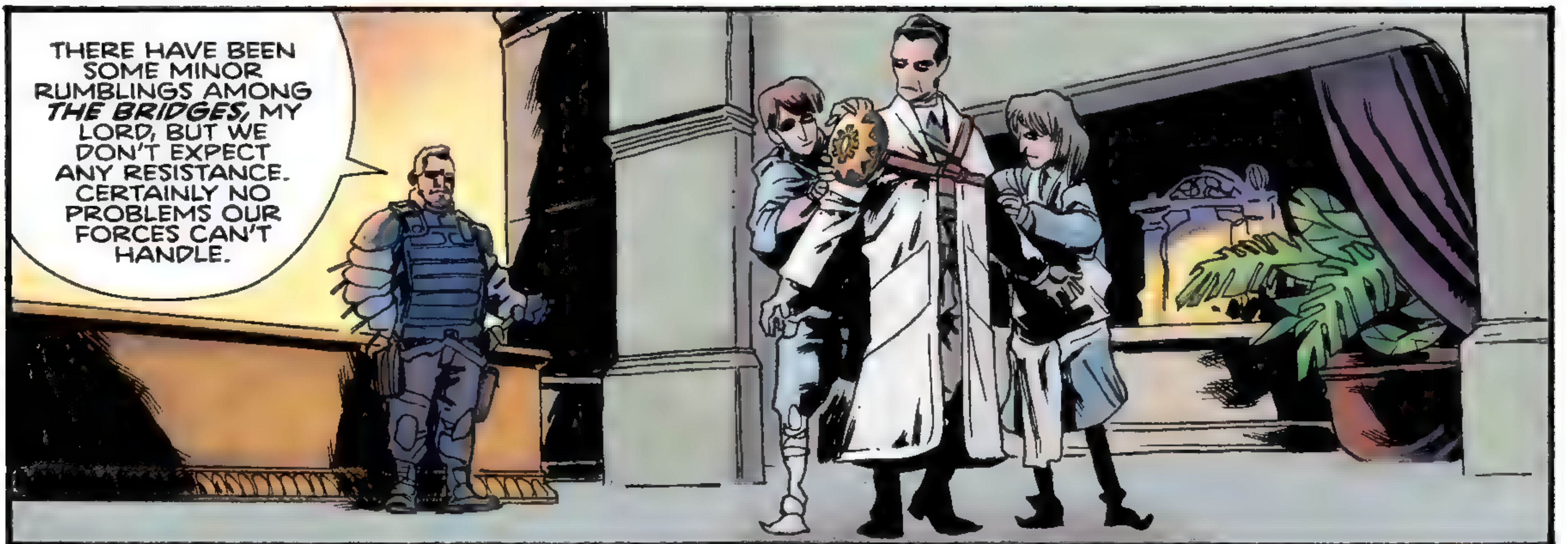
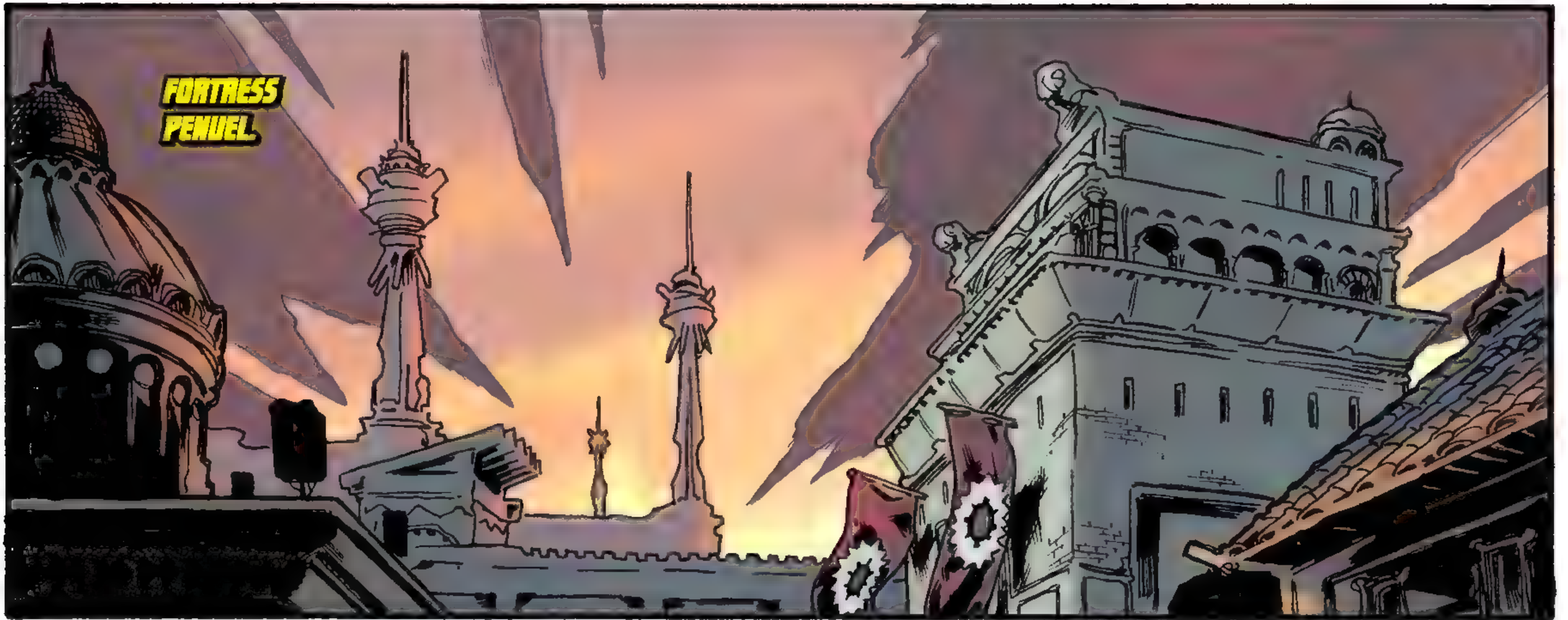
...a Saint.

IT'S TIME, SIMON. I JUST WANTED TO SAY GOODBYE. GOODBYE AND THANK YOU--

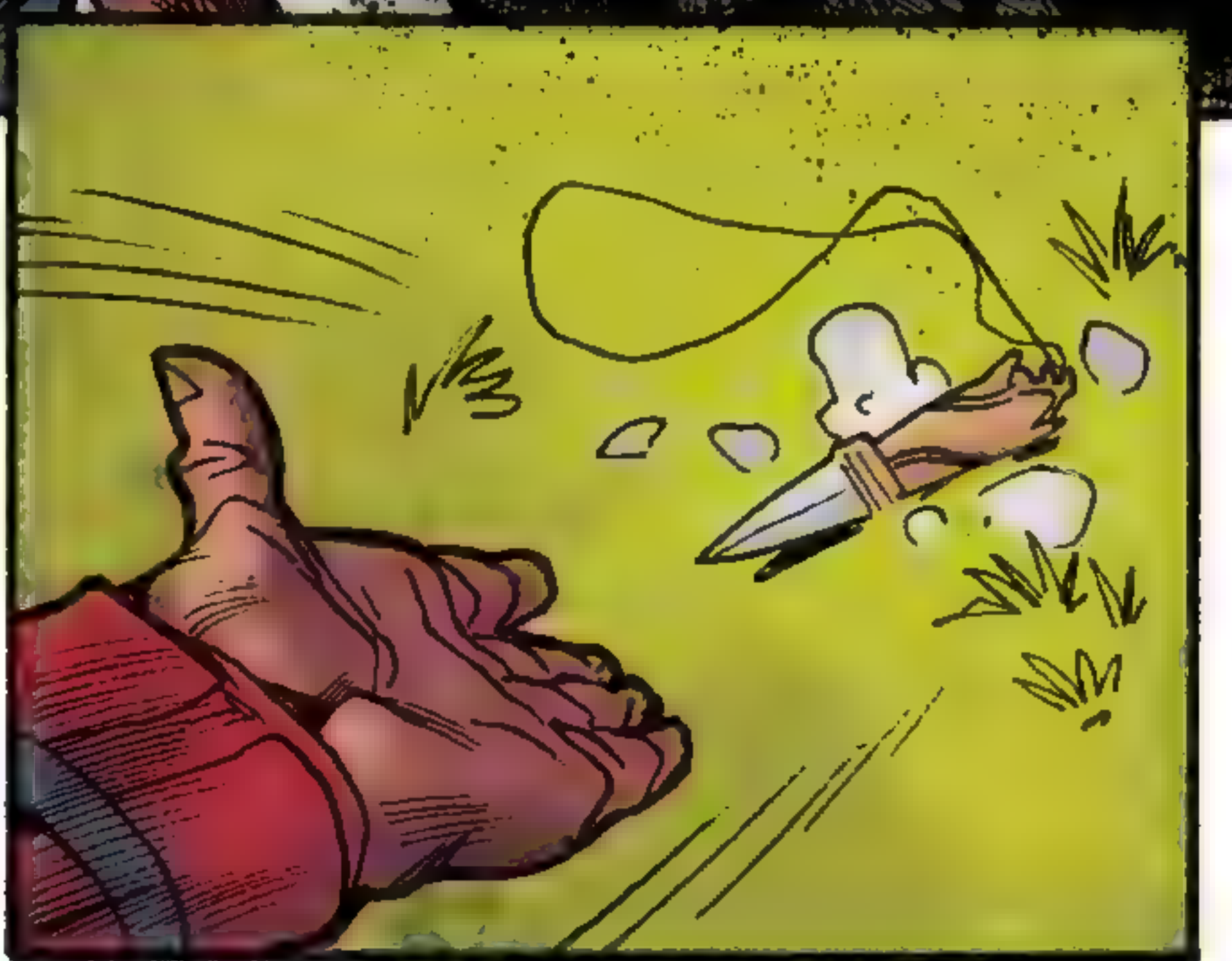
Oh, **YOU'RE** CERTAINLY NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITHOUT **ME**. WHO WOULD GET YOU OUT OF TROUBLE?













DEAR  
GOD...  
THERE'S NO  
END TO  
THEM!

...WOLFE'S ARMY IS *HUGE*.  
MORE THAN *TWICE* AS MANY  
AS WE FEARED.

ALL THE  
CADRES ARE  
IN POSITION,  
ANZIO.

HOLD...

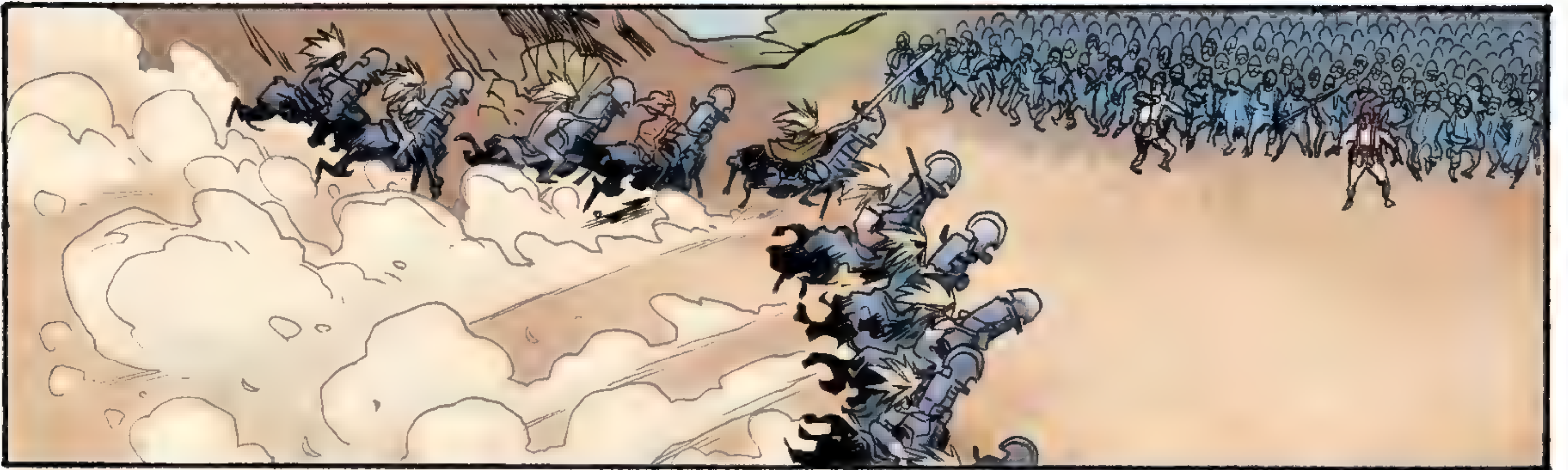
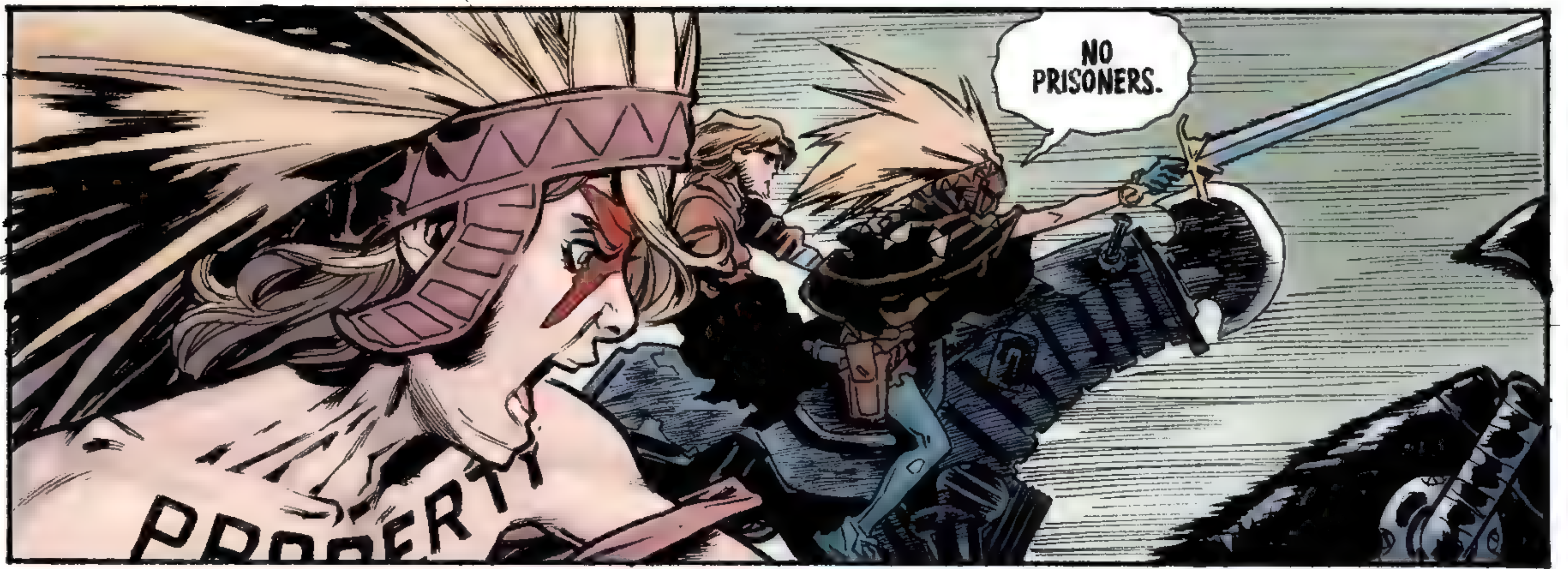
CAPTAIN  
E'LEE? WHAT'S  
THIS, SIR...?

Oh...IT'S LIKELY  
AN ATTEMPT TO PARLAY.  
OR ~~SHAH~~ PERHAPS,  
THE FOOLS ARE TRYING  
TO SURRENDER.





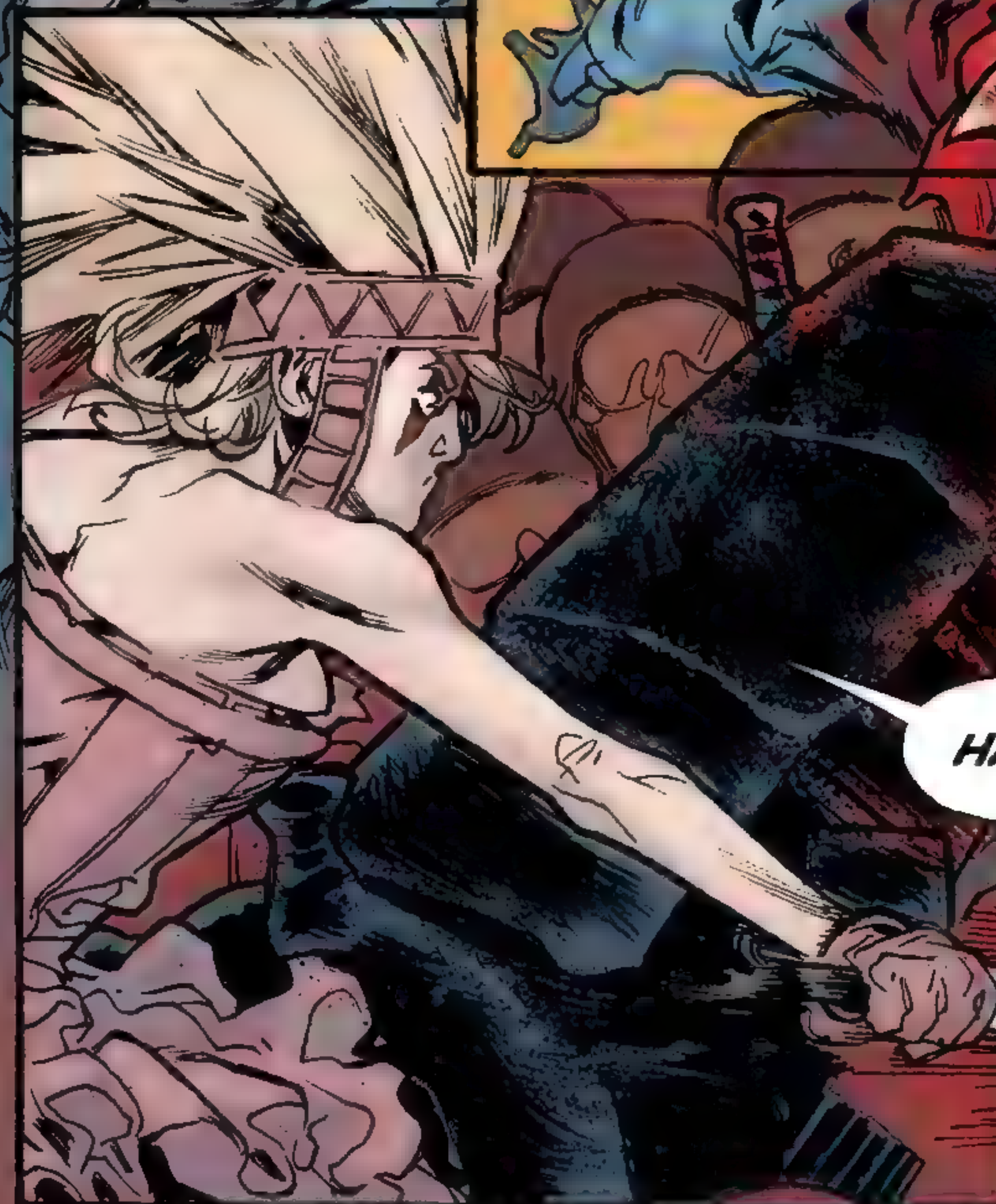




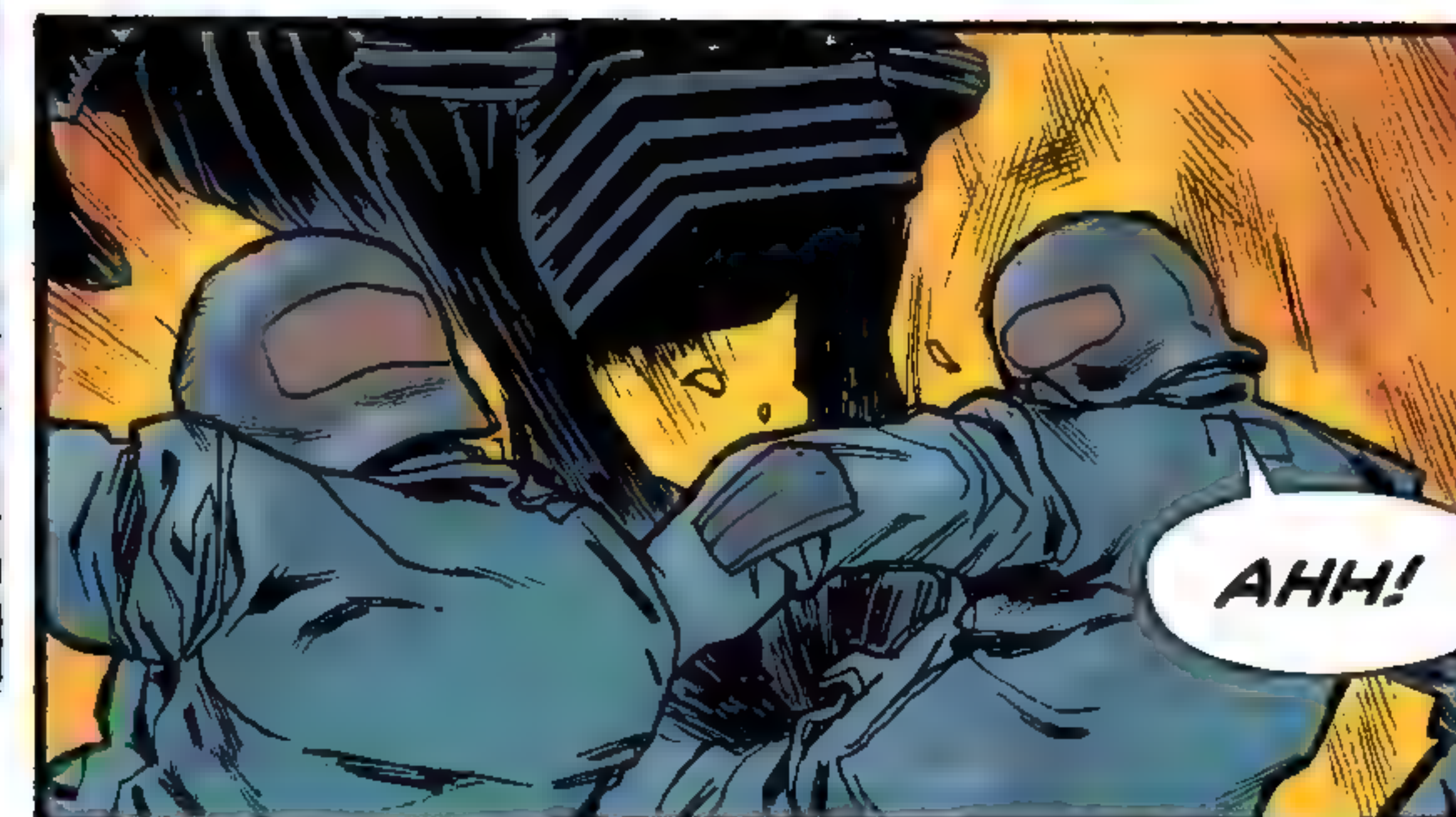
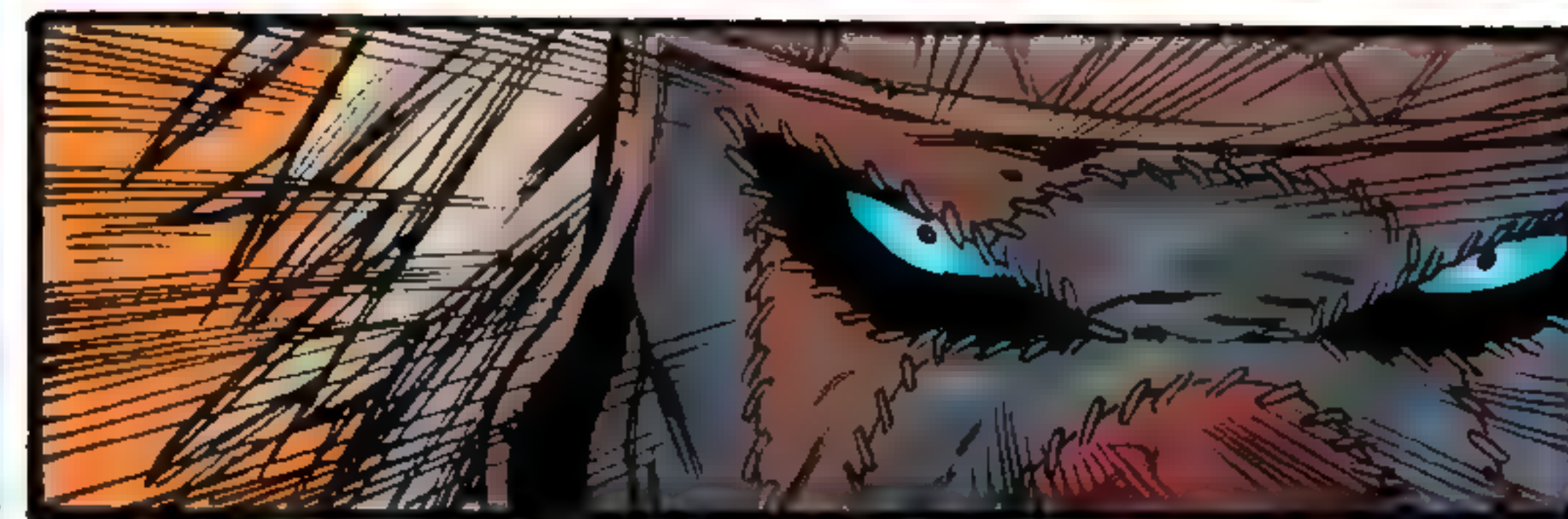




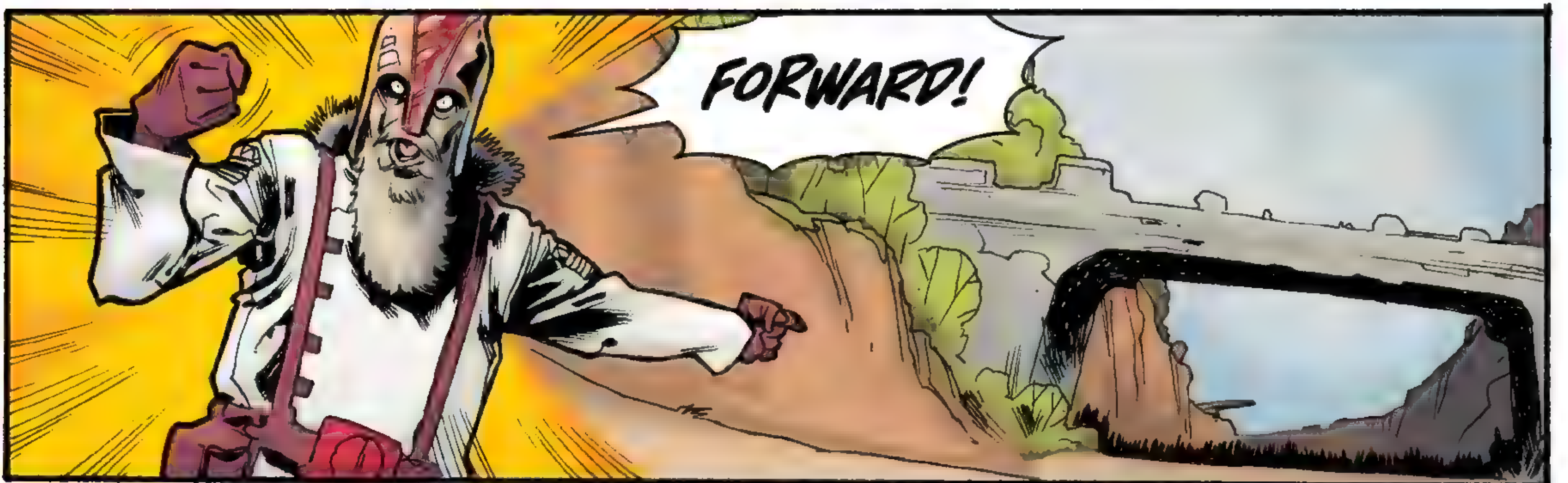
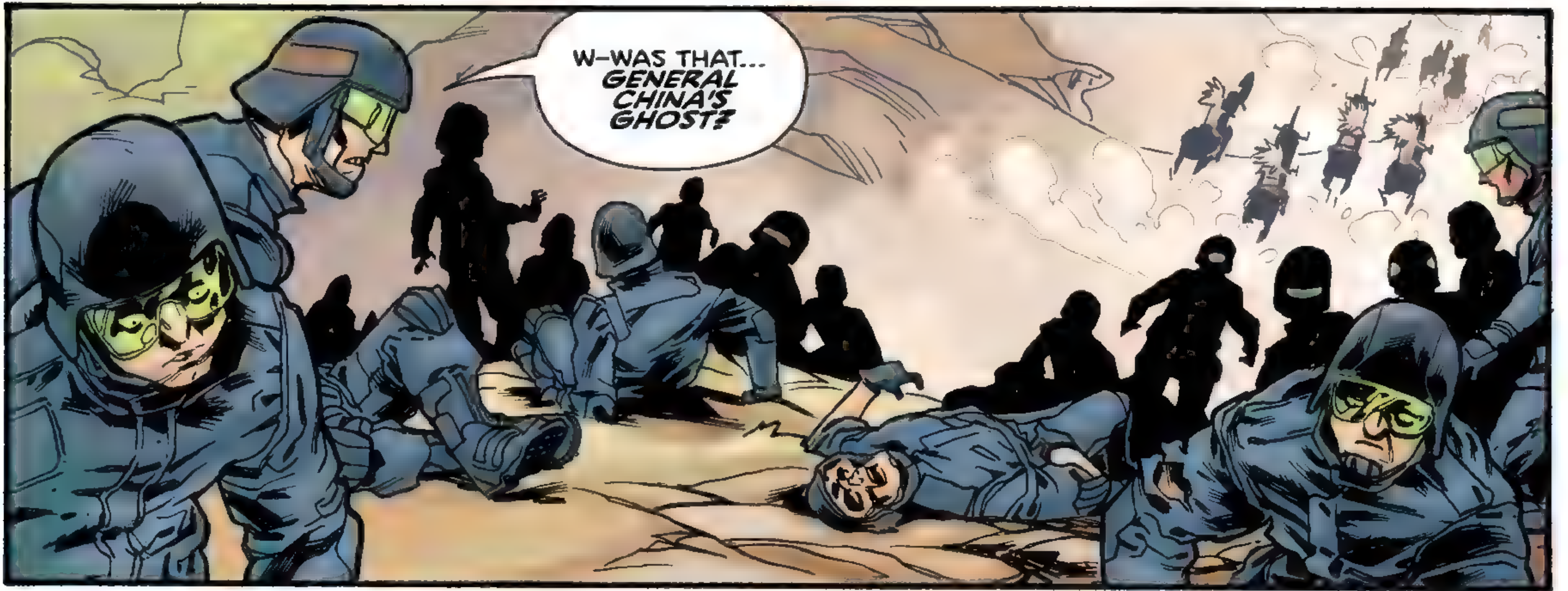
UGH!



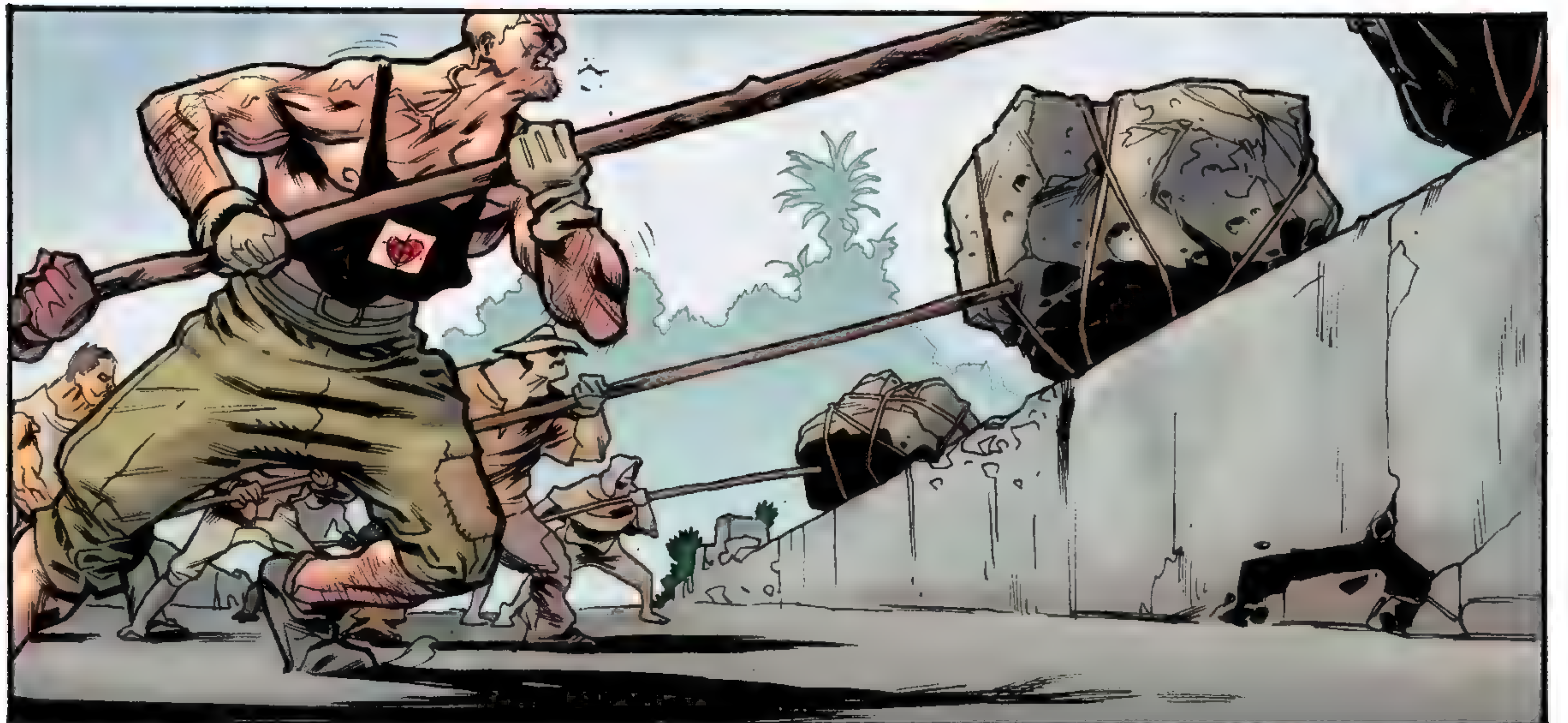
HAH!



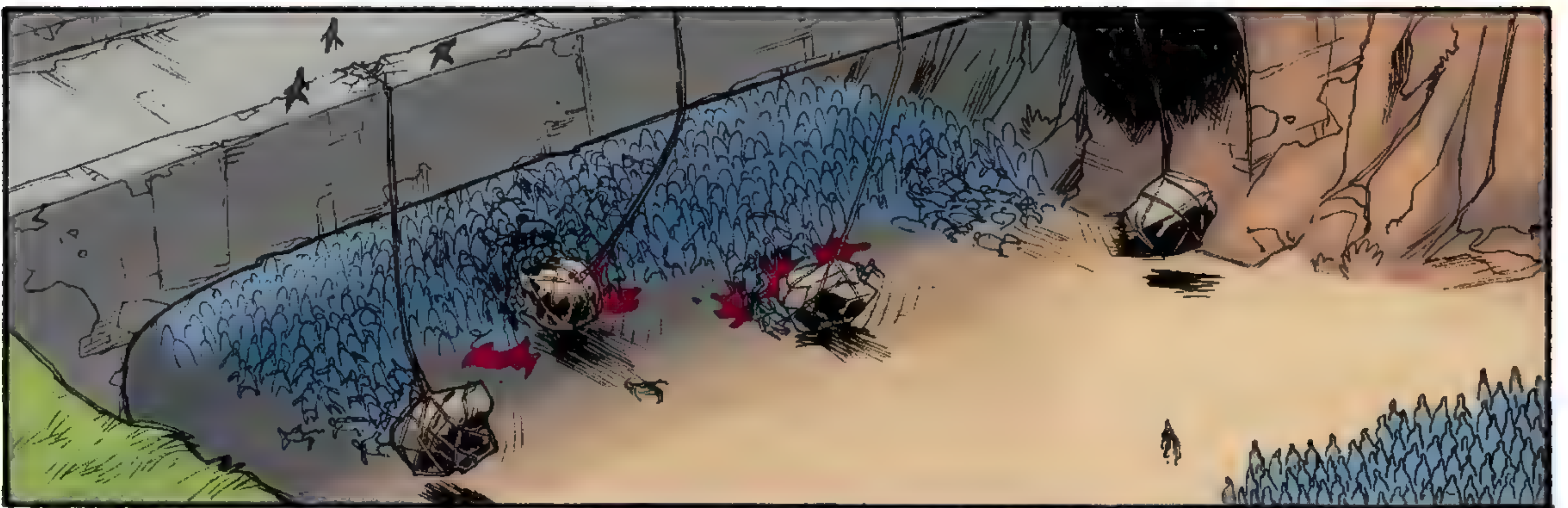
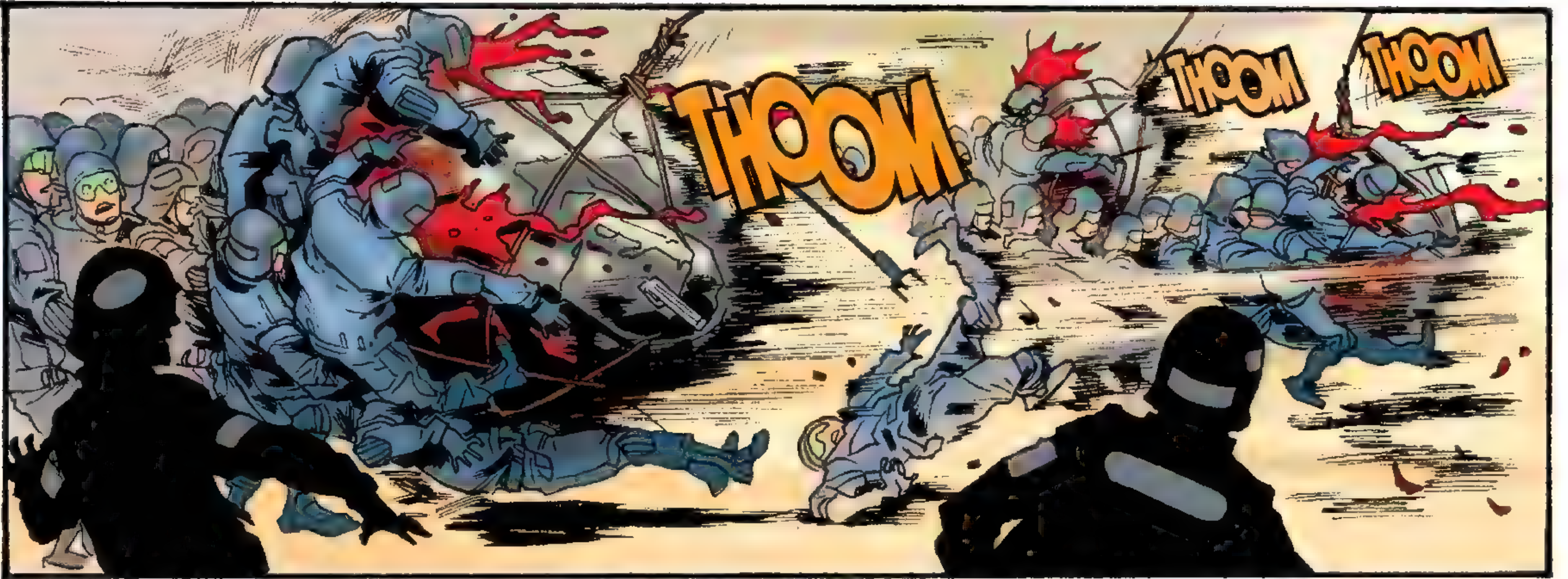
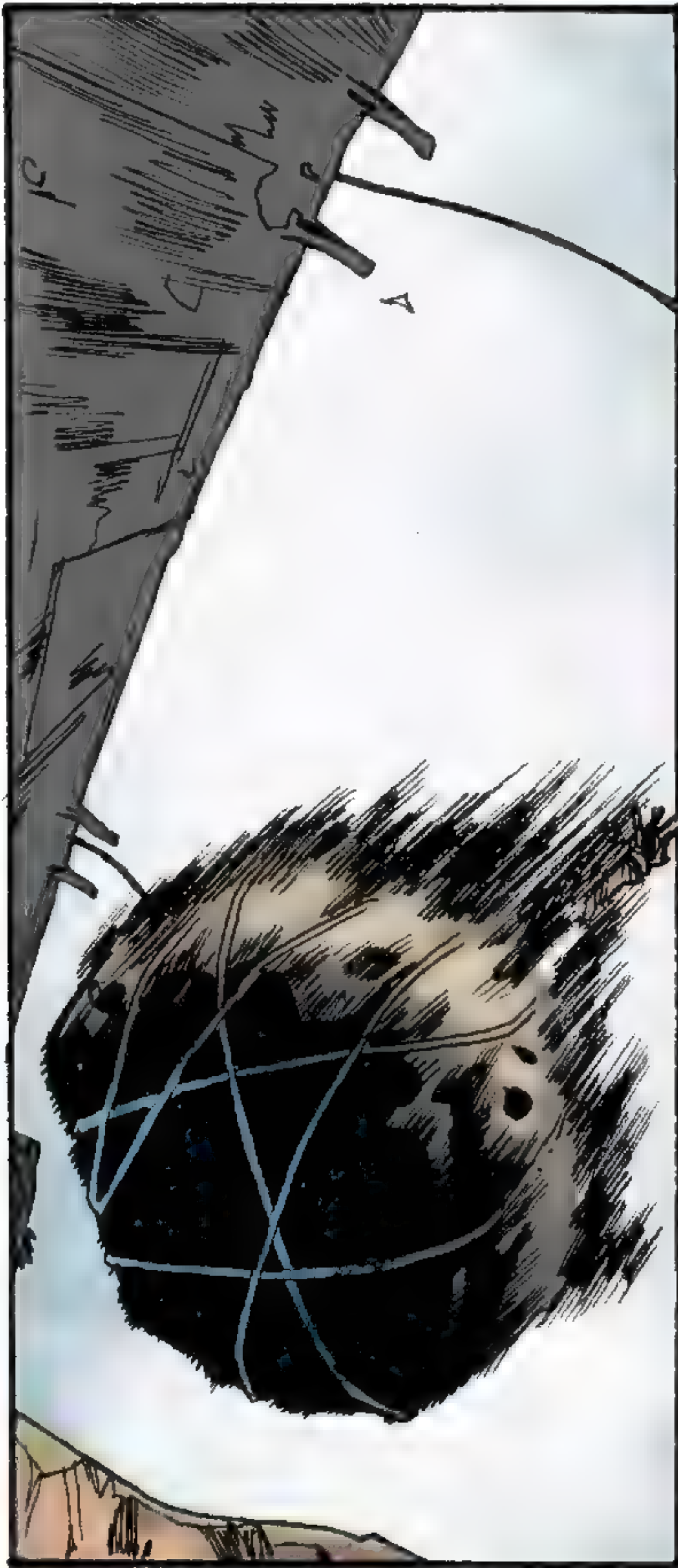
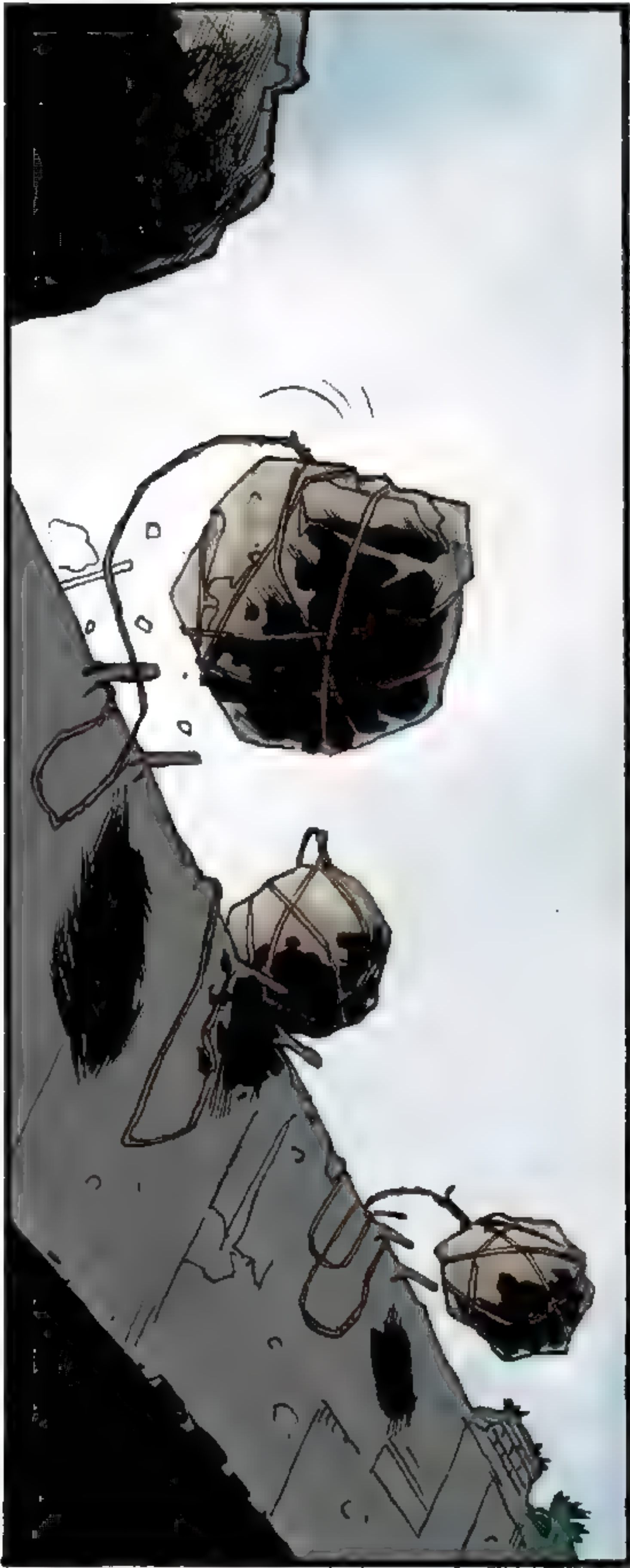




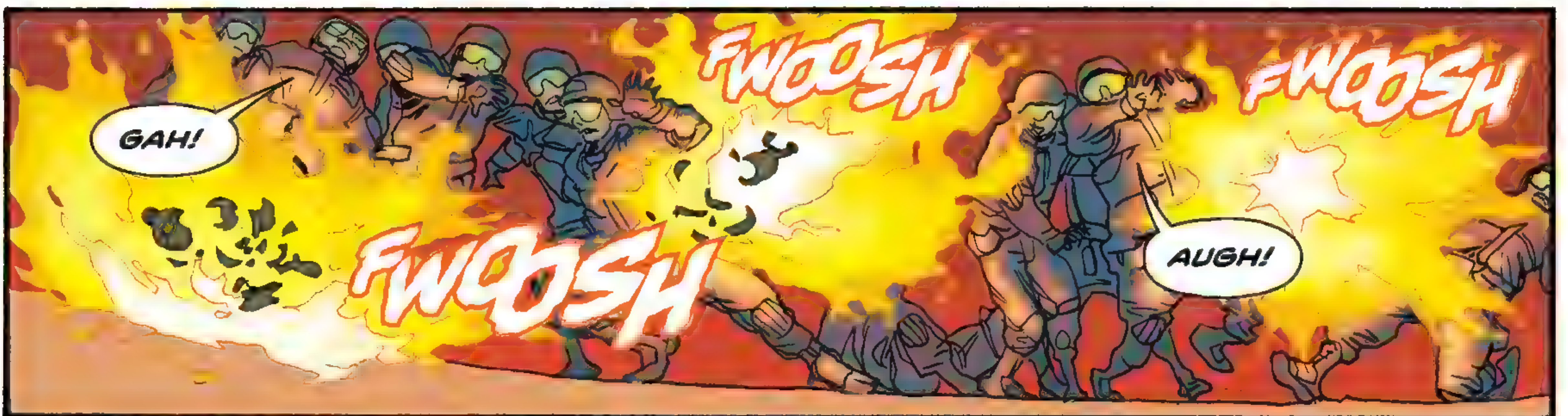
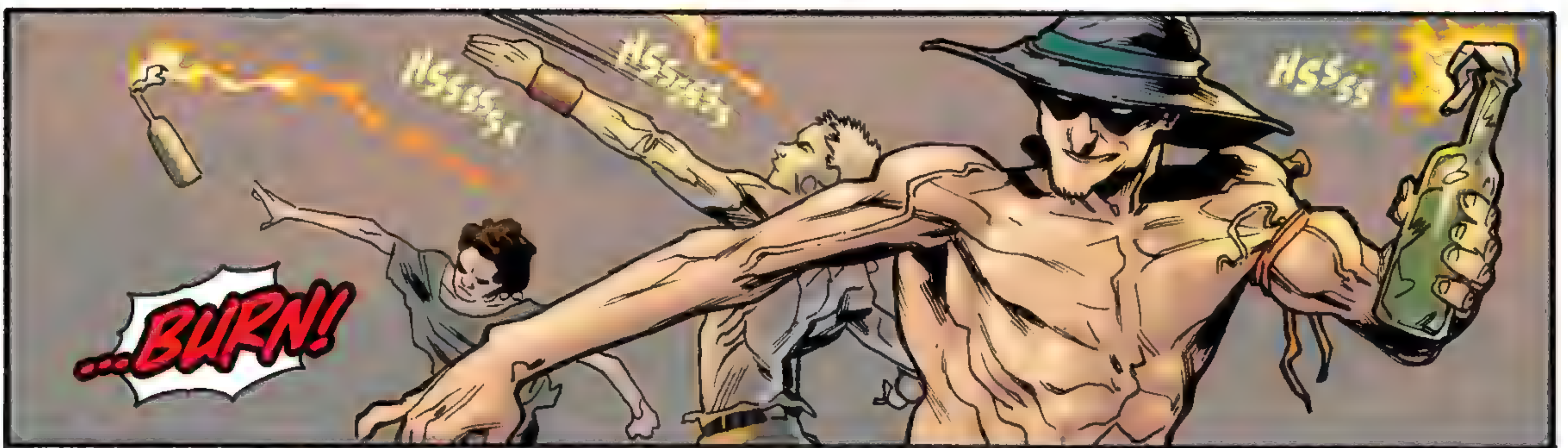




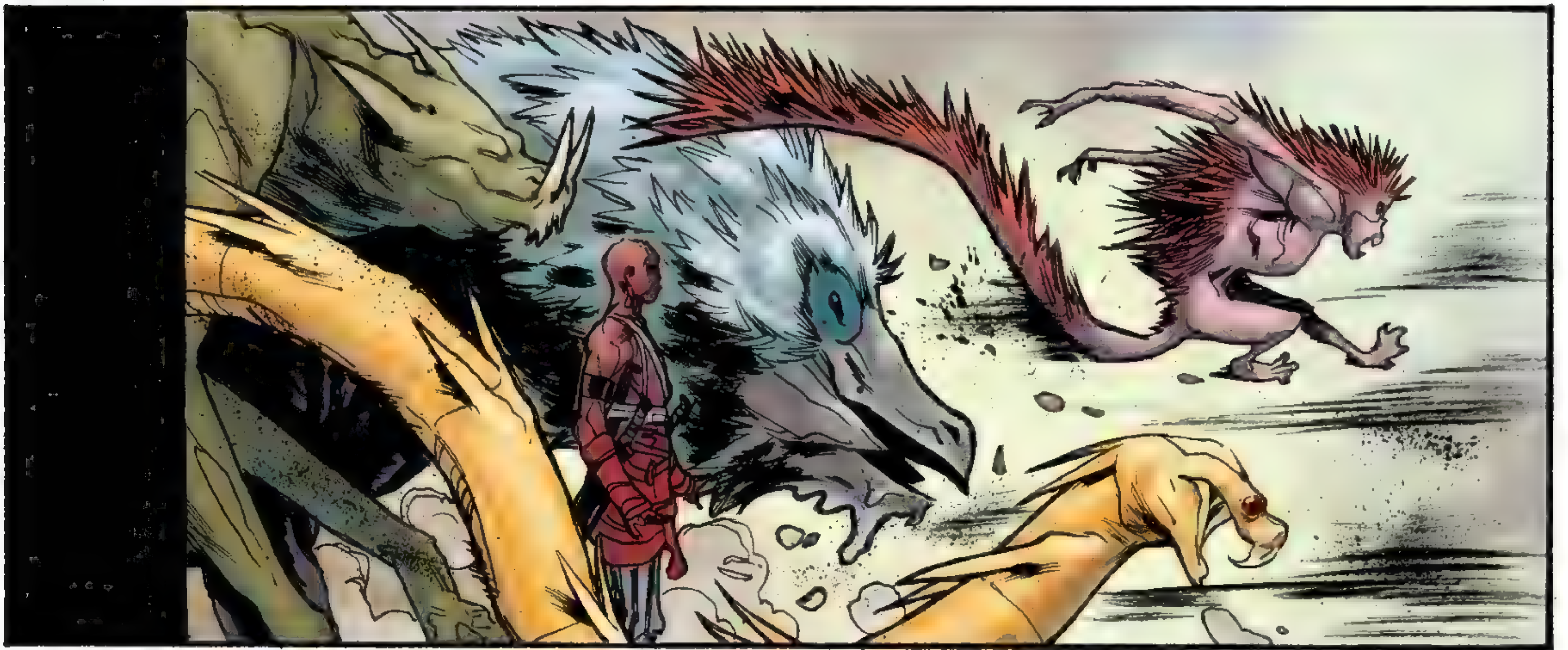




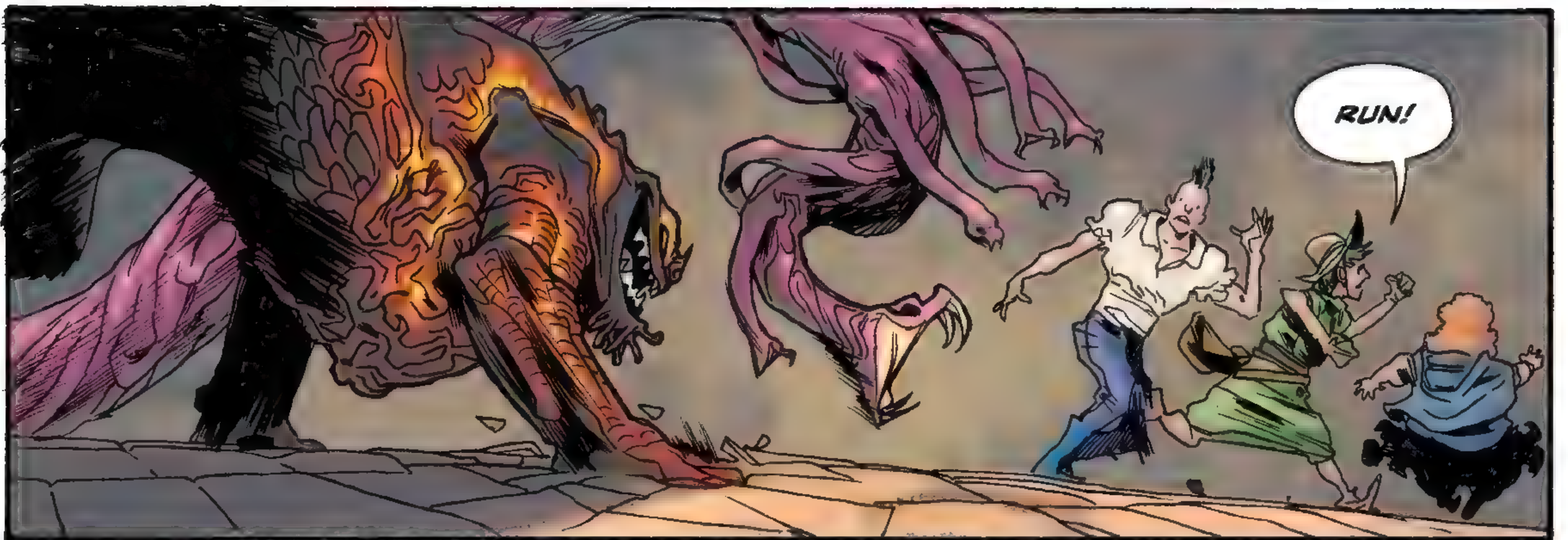




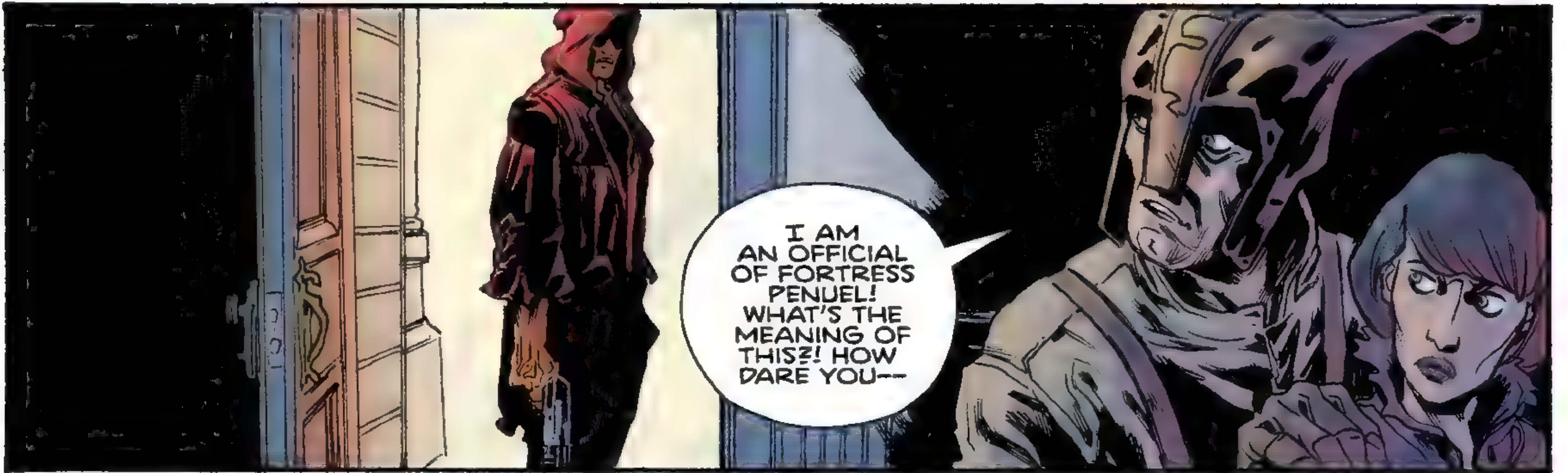








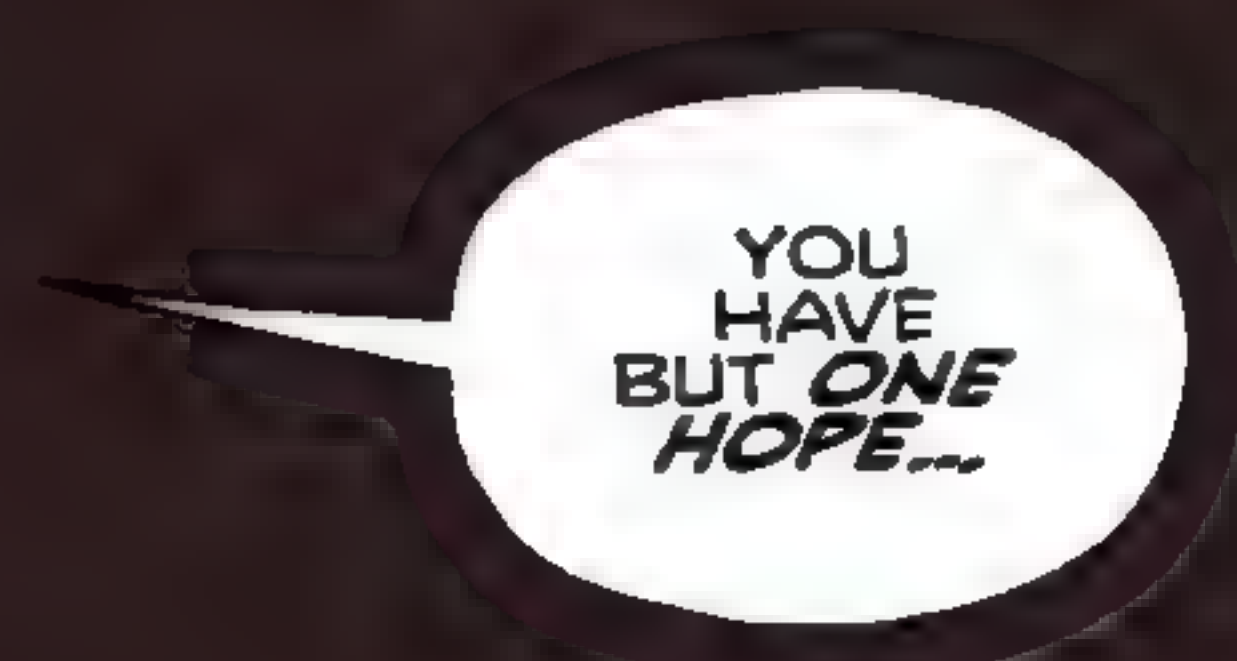









**THE NIGHT BEFORE.**








WHATEVER LITTLE TRICKS  
YOU HAVE PLANNED,  
REMEMBER--**NOTHING** CAN  
SAVE THE BRIDGE PEOPLE.  
BUT THERE **MAY** BE AN  
OPENING TO GET TO TOMO  
WOLFE. WHILE WOLFE'S  
ATTENTION IS FOCUSED  
ON THE BRIDGES, ORCHID  
**MUST** TAKE HER CHANCE  
TO DESTROY HIM.

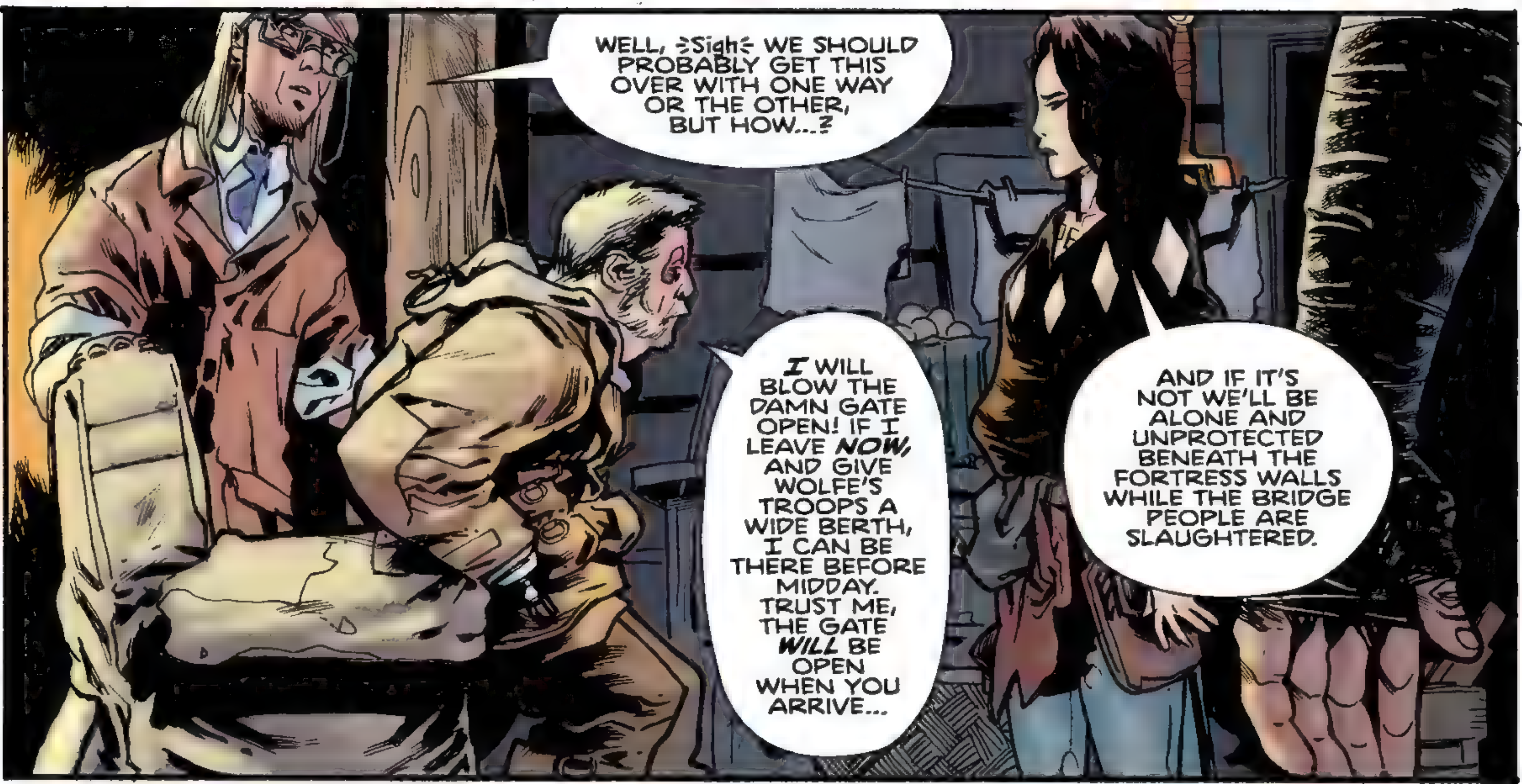
WE WILL  
DO WHATEVER  
IT TAKES TO BUY  
HER AS MUCH  
TIME AS  
POSSIBLE.

BUT THEY'LL  
HAVE TRIPLED THE  
GUARD ON FORTRESS  
PENUEL! THERE'S  
NO WAY **IN**!



THERE **IS** A  
WAY. I'VE SEEN IT.  
IT'S CALLED THE  
**PENITENT'S GATEWAY**,  
AN ENTRANCE TO THE  
FORTRESS LONG  
SEALED SHUT. DIFFICULT  
TO REACH, BUT IT  
WILL LIKELY BE  
UNDEFENDED.

IF  
IT COULD  
BE BREACHED...  
YOU'D HAVE  
DIRECT ACCESS  
TO WOLFE  
HIMSELF.

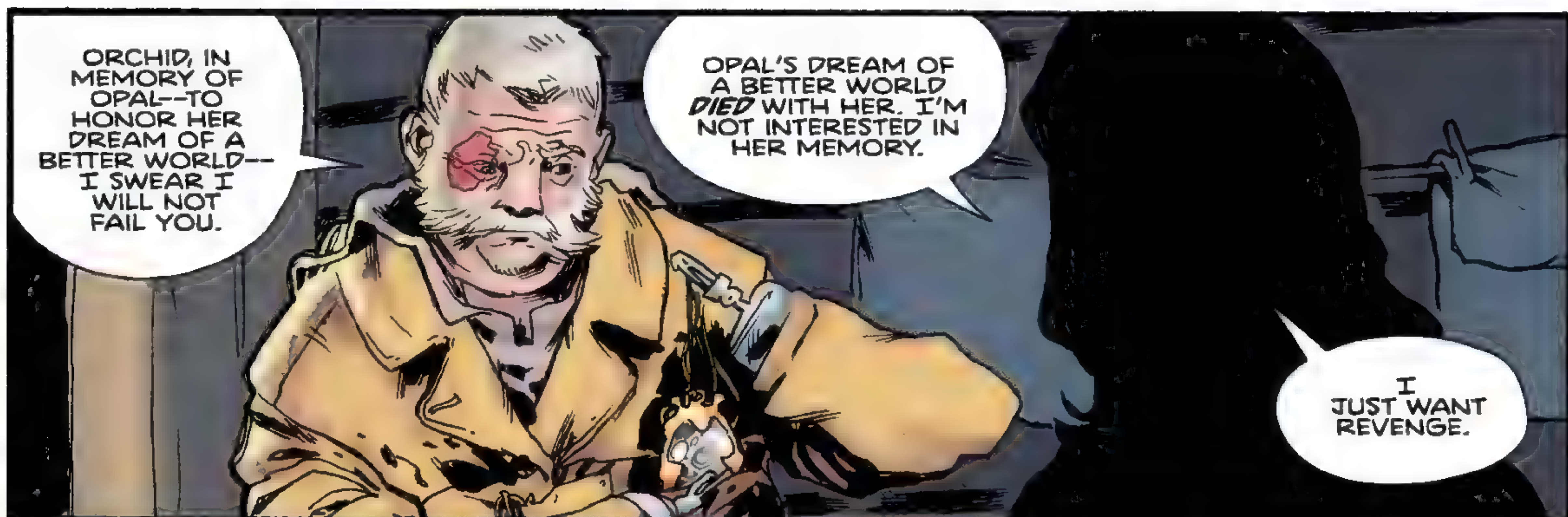


WELL, **~Sigh~** WE SHOULD  
PROBABLY GET THIS  
OVER WITH ONE WAY  
OR THE OTHER,  
BUT HOW...?

I WILL  
BLOW THE  
DAMN GATE  
OPEN! IF I  
LEAVE **NOW**,  
AND GIVE  
WOLFE'S  
TROOPS A  
WIDE BERTH,  
I CAN BE  
THERE BEFORE  
MIDDAY.  
TRUST ME,  
THE GATE  
**WILL** BE  
OPEN  
WHEN YOU  
ARRIVE...

AND IF IT'S  
NOT WE'LL BE  
ALONE AND  
UNPROTECTED  
BENEATH THE  
FORTRESS WALLS  
WHILE THE BRIDGE  
PEOPLE ARE  
SLAUGHTERED.

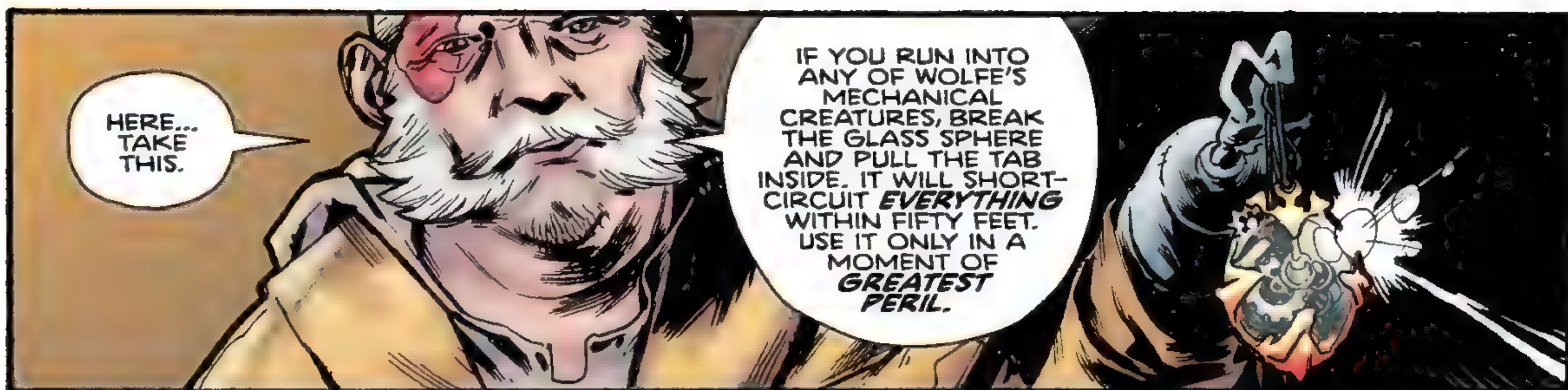




ORCHID, IN  
MEMORY OF  
OPAL--TO  
HONOR HER  
DREAM OF A  
BETTER WORLD--  
I SWEAR I  
WILL NOT  
FAIL YOU.

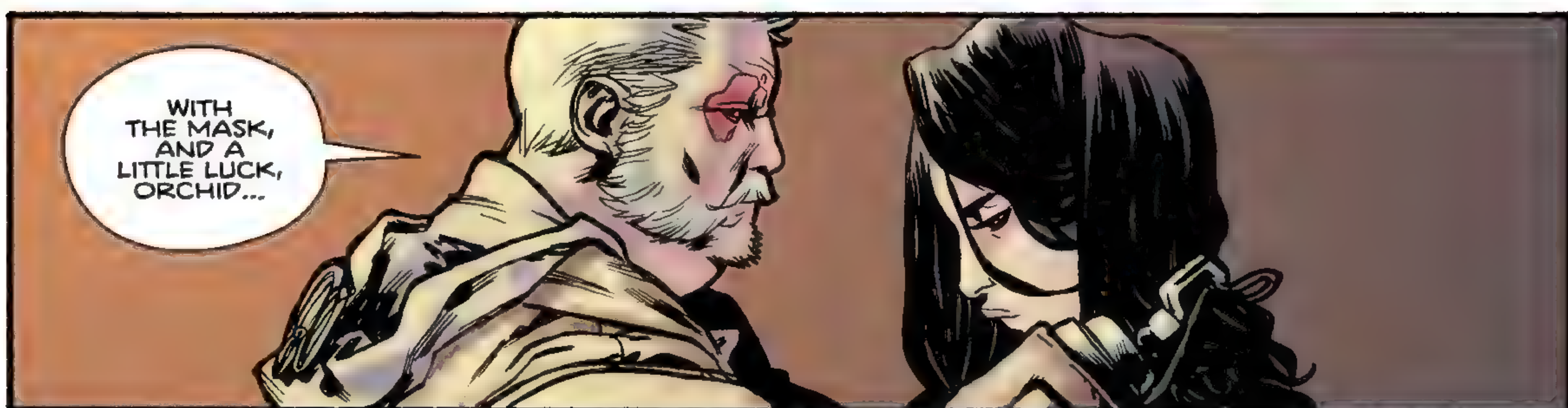
OPAL'S DREAM OF  
A BETTER WORLD  
*DIED* WITH HER. I'M  
NOT INTERESTED IN  
HER MEMORY.

I  
JUST WANT  
REVENGE.

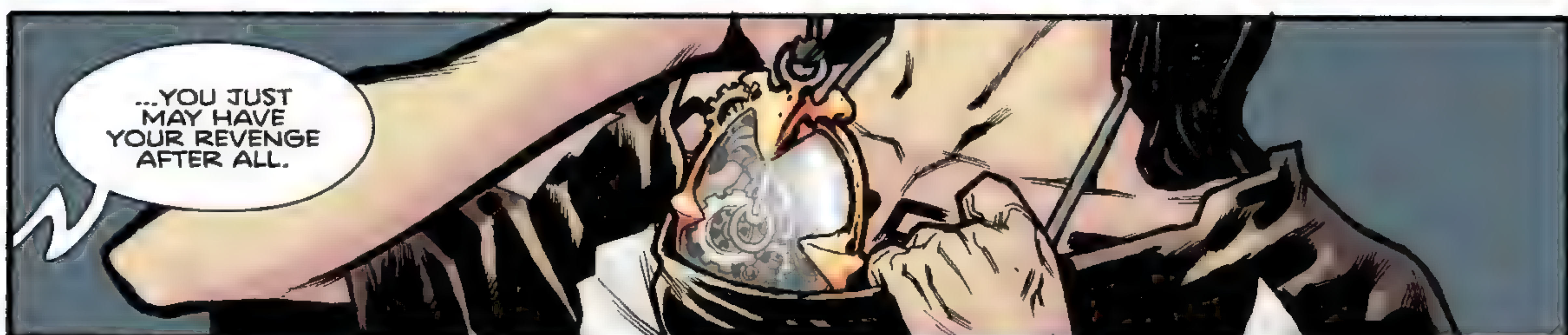


HERE...  
TAKE  
THIS.

IF YOU RUN INTO  
ANY OF WOLFE'S  
MECHANICAL  
CREATURES, BREAK  
THE GLASS SPHERE  
AND PULL THE TAB  
INSIDE. IT WILL SHORT-  
CIRCUIT *EVERYTHING*  
WITHIN FIFTY FEET.  
USE IT ONLY IN A  
MOMENT OF  
*GREATEST*  
PERIL.



WITH  
THE MASK,  
AND A  
LITTLE LUCK,  
ORCHID...



...YOU JUST  
MAY HAVE  
YOUR REVENGE  
AFTER ALL.



**NOW!**

WE'RE HERE,  
SIMON. PENITENT'S  
GATEWAY.





AND  
WESTIN  
HAS FAILED  
US.





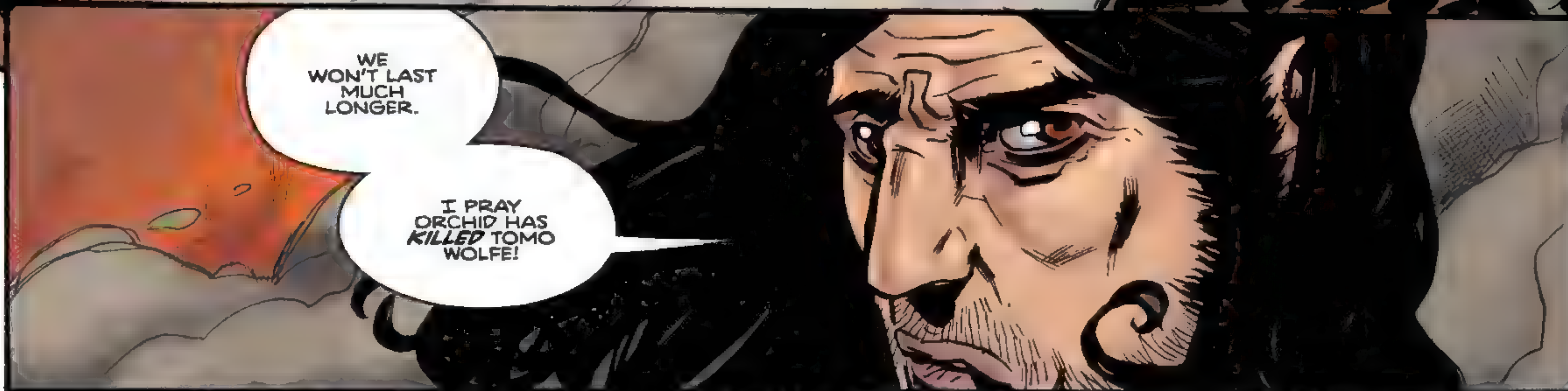








SHADOW  
REBELS...  
**FALL  
BACK!**



WE  
WON'T LAST  
MUCH  
LONGER.

I PRAY  
ORCHID HAS  
KILLED TOMO  
WOLFE!





**THE PENITENT'S  
GATEWAY.**

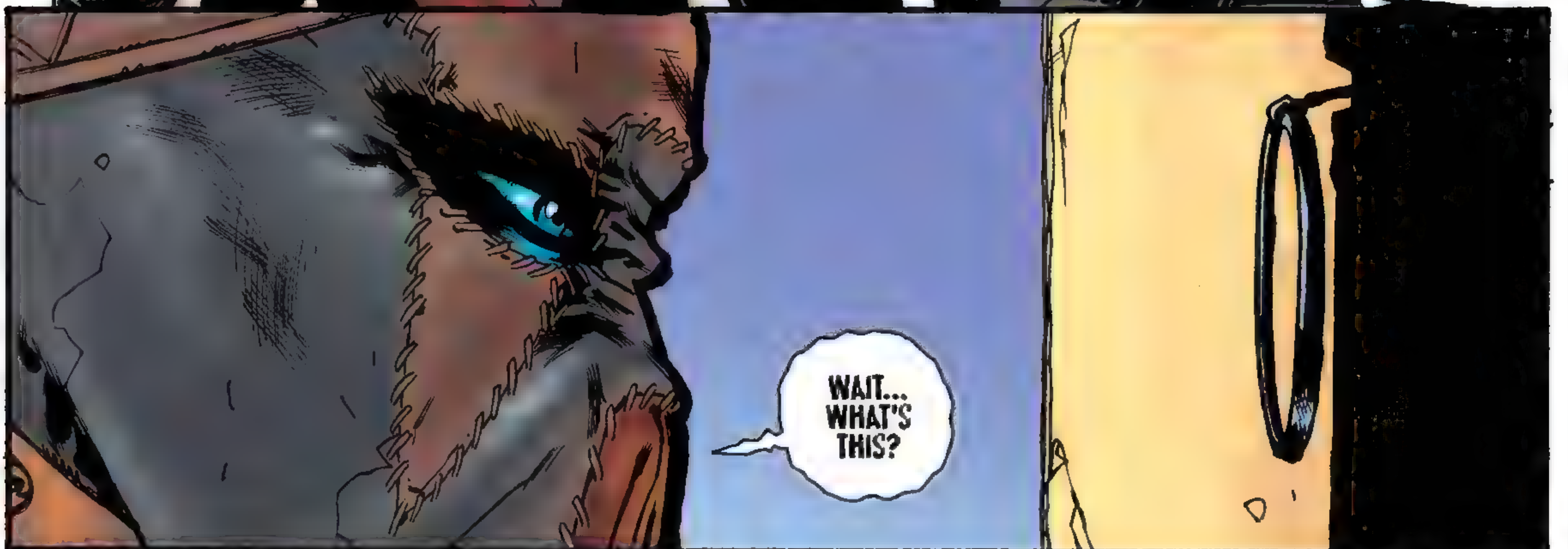


THERE'S  
NO WAY  
IN.



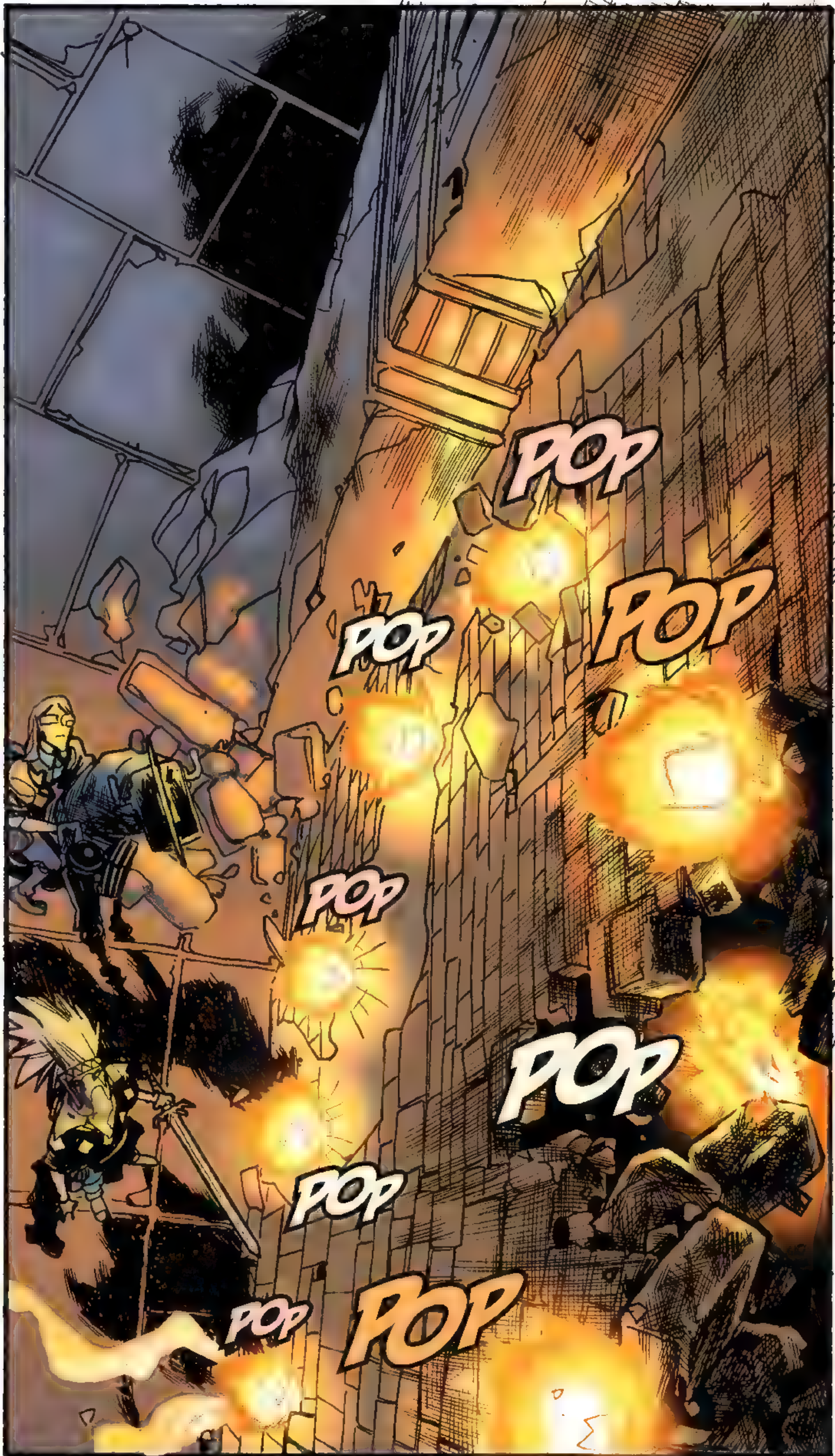
EITHER WESTIN  
DIDN'T MAKE IT.  
OR HE DIDN'T  
TRY.

BUT  
THERE ARE  
FOOTPRINTS  
HERE. MAYBE  
HE TURNED  
BACK?

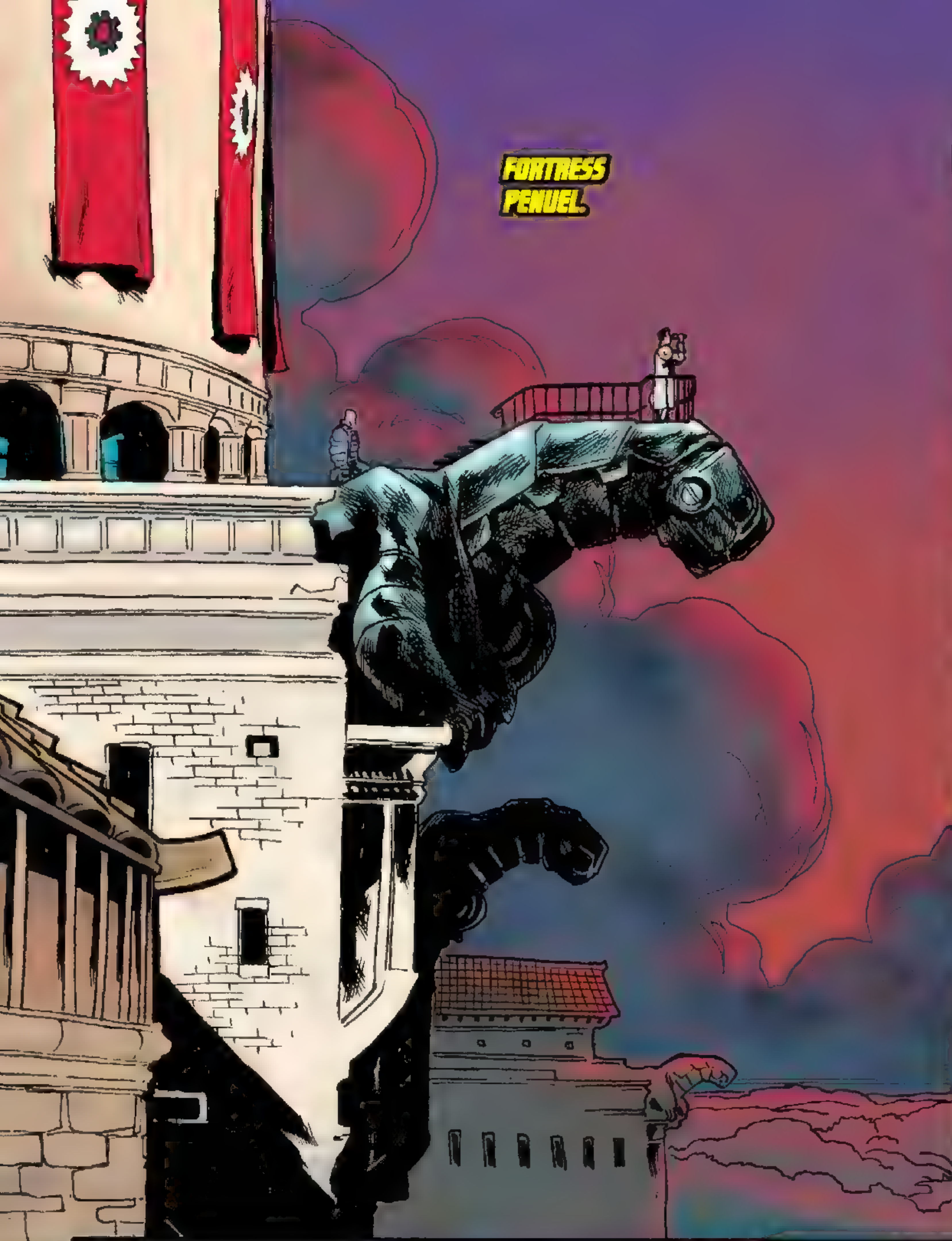


WAIT...  
WHAT'S  
THIS?









**FORTRESS  
PENUEL**



IT WON'T BE LONG NOW, GLETKIN. THE BRIDGE PEOPLE WILL SOON BE ERADICATED, ERASED FROM HISTORY--

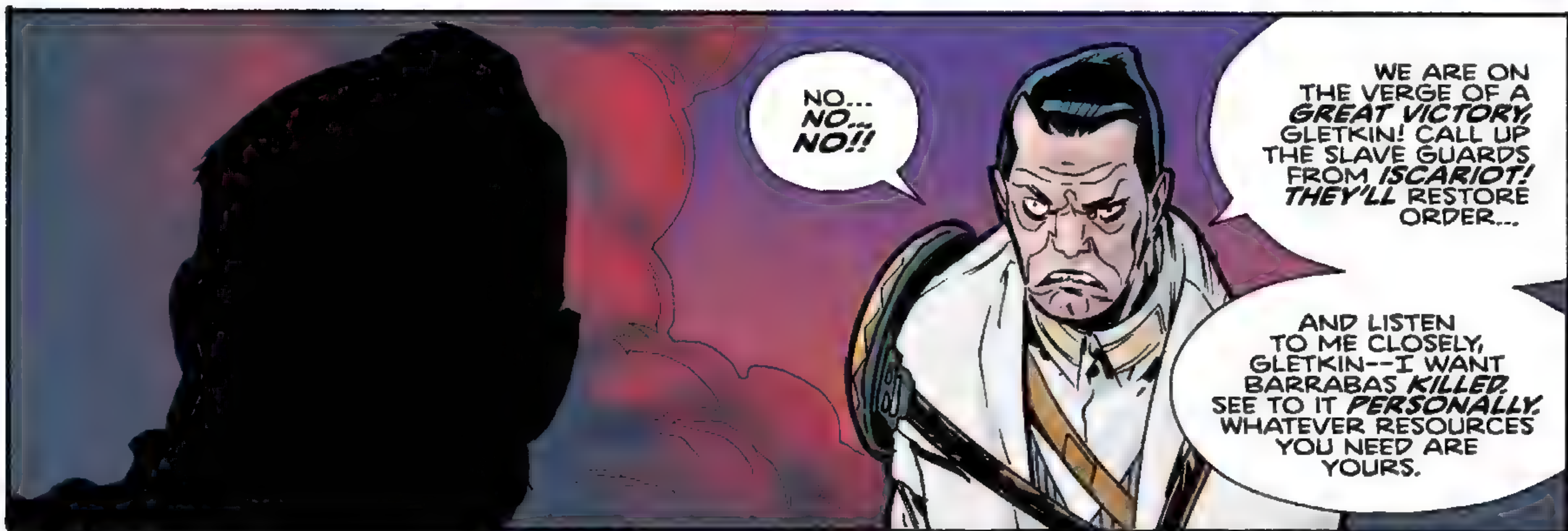
MY LORD! THERE'S **CHAOS** IN THE STREETS OF FORTRESS PENUEL!



DON BARRABAS HAS GONE **MAD**, MY LORD! HE HAS **MURDERED** EVERY TOP OFFICIAL IN THE FORTRESS AND HE'S RELEASED HIS **FOUL CREATURES** ON THE CITIZENRY!

**BARRABAS?!**

SHALL WE RECALL THE ARMY, MY LORD?



NO...  
NO...  
NO!!

WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF A **GREAT VICTORY**, GLETKIN! CALL UP THE SLAVE GUARDS FROM **ISCARIOT**! THEY'LL RESTORE ORDER...

AND LISTEN TO ME CLOSELY, GLETKIN--I WANT **BARRABAS KILLED**. SEE TO IT **PERSONALLY**. WHATEVER RESOURCES YOU NEED ARE YOURS.





DO NOT  
**UNDERESTIMATE**  
BARRABAS. HE IS...  
RESOURCEFUL.

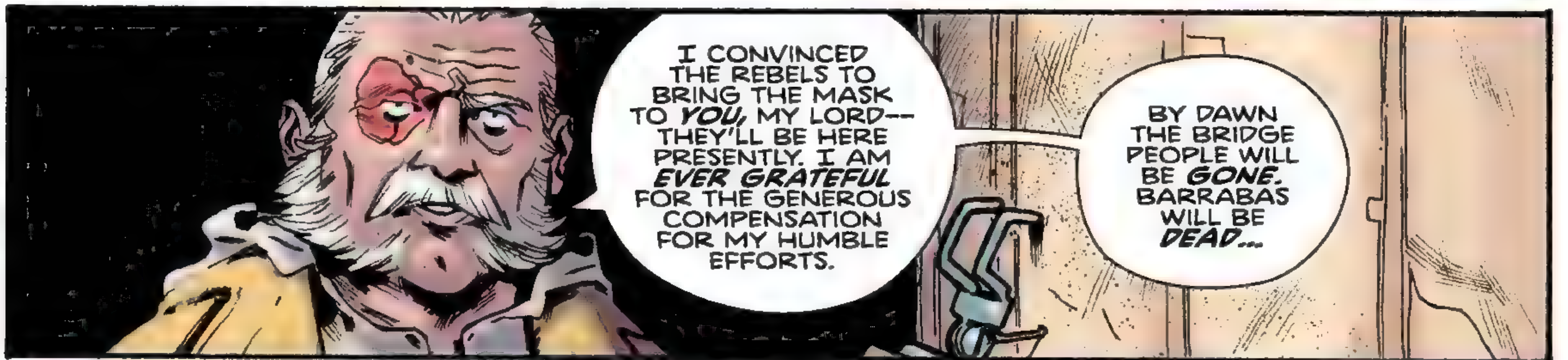
I WILL  
BRING THE TRAITOR  
TO JUSTICE, MY LORD!  
WITH THE HELP OF  
**THIS MAN.**



GOOD  
DAY...MY  
LORD.

WESTIN'S  
HIS NAME, LONG-  
TIME INFORMANT,  
WEAPONS MAN.  
THERE'S NO JOB HE  
**CAN'T** GET DONE--IF  
THE PRICE IS RIGHT.  
HIS EXPLOSIVES AND  
POISONS ARE MORE  
THAN A MATCH FOR  
BARRABAS.

AND...  
HE'S BEEN  
EMBEDDED  
WITH THE  
REBELS FOR  
SOME TIME.



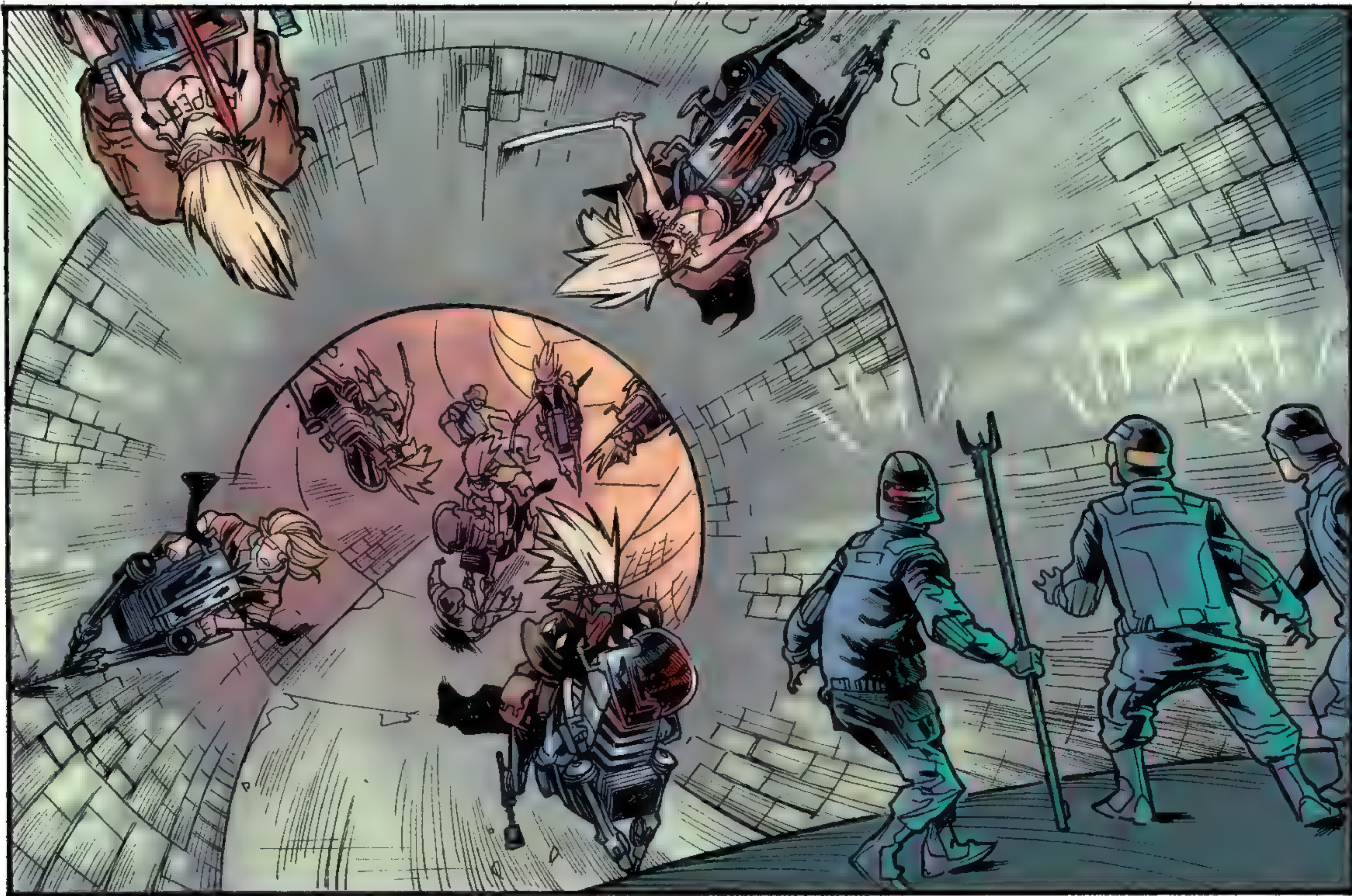
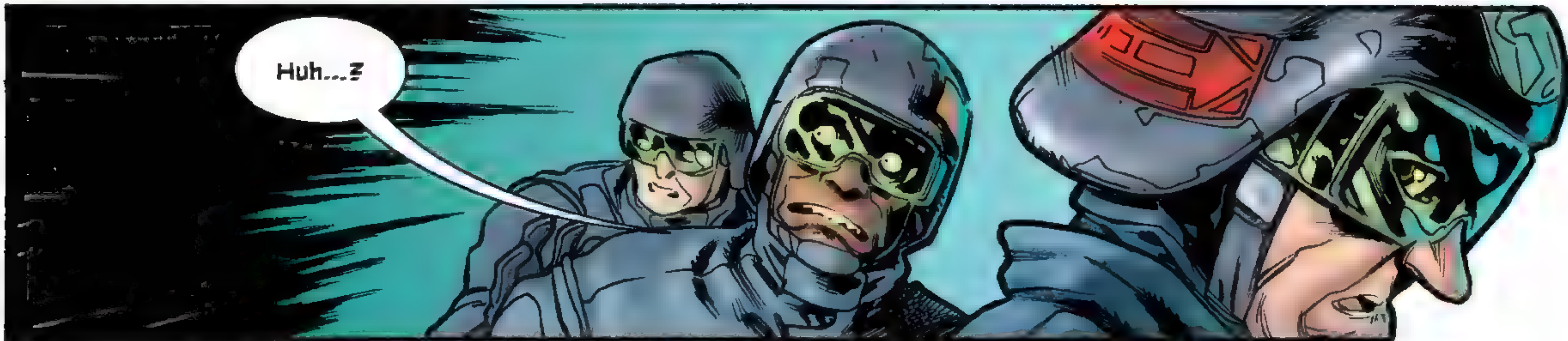
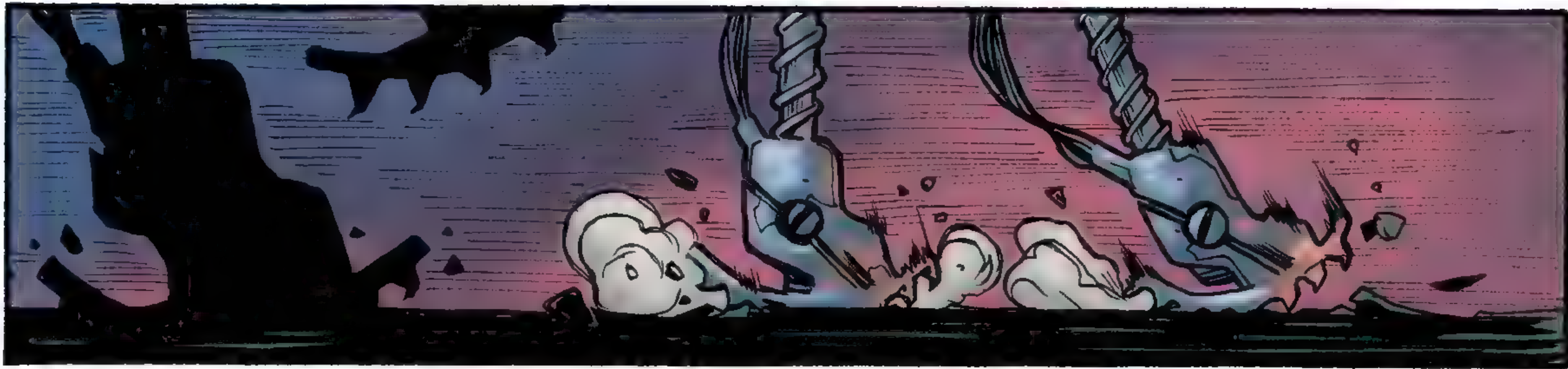
I CONVINCED  
THE REBELS TO  
BRING THE MASK  
TO **YOU**, MY LORD--  
THEY'LL BE HERE  
PRESENTLY. I AM  
**EVER GRATEFUL**  
FOR THE GENEROUS  
COMPENSATION  
FOR MY HUMBLE  
EFFORTS.

BY DAWN  
THE BRIDGE  
PEOPLE WILL  
BE **GONE**.  
BARRABAS  
WILL BE  
**DEAD...**

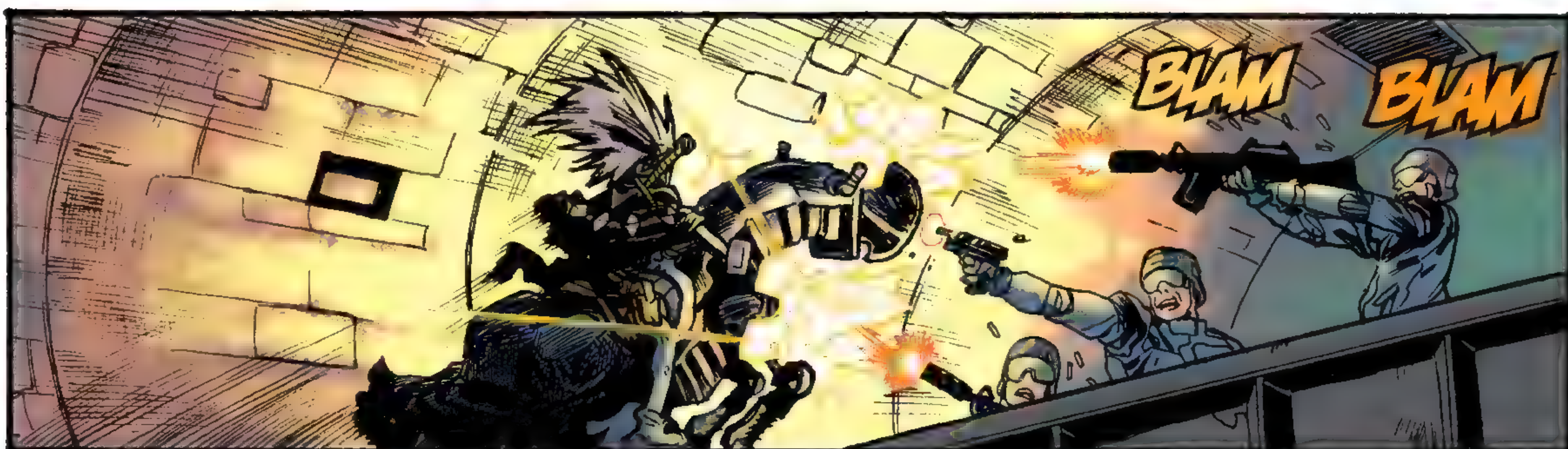
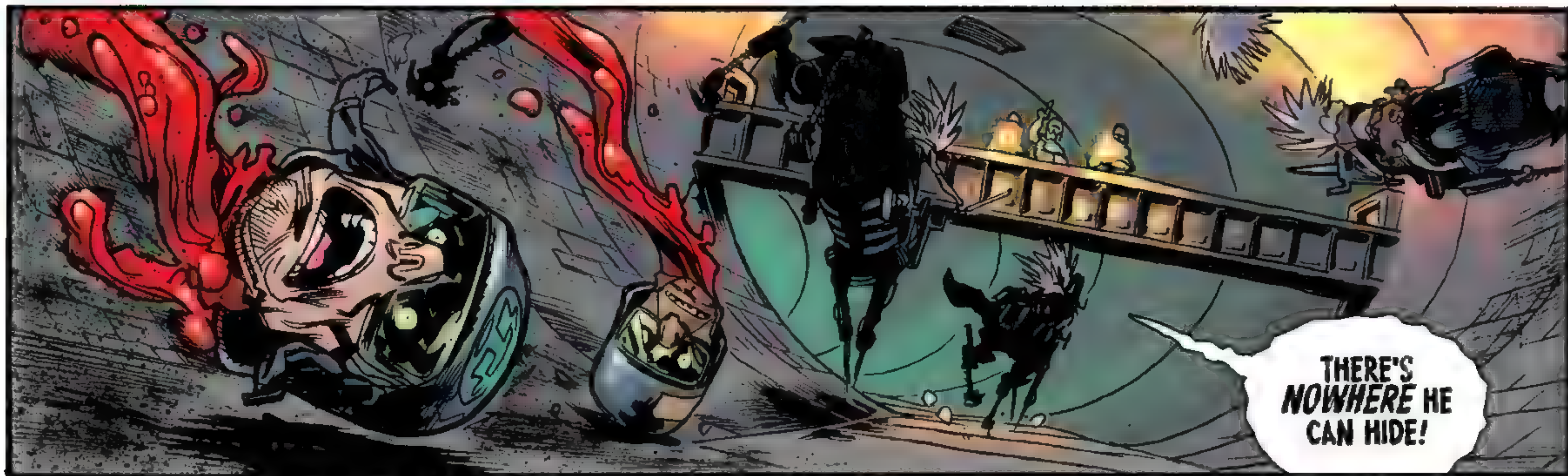


...AND  
AT LAST, **DON**  
WESTIN--THE  
MASK WILL BE  
**MINE.**

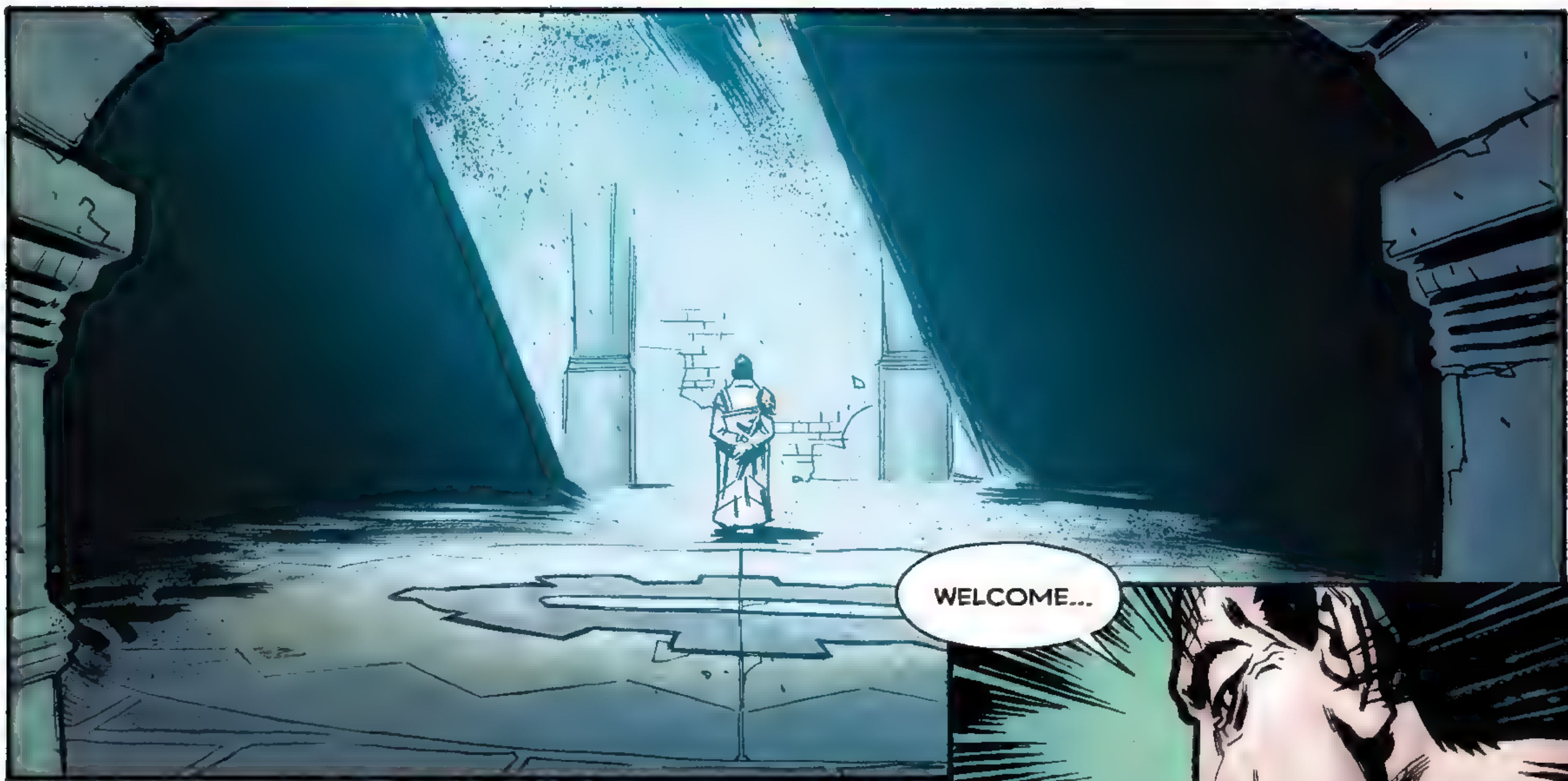




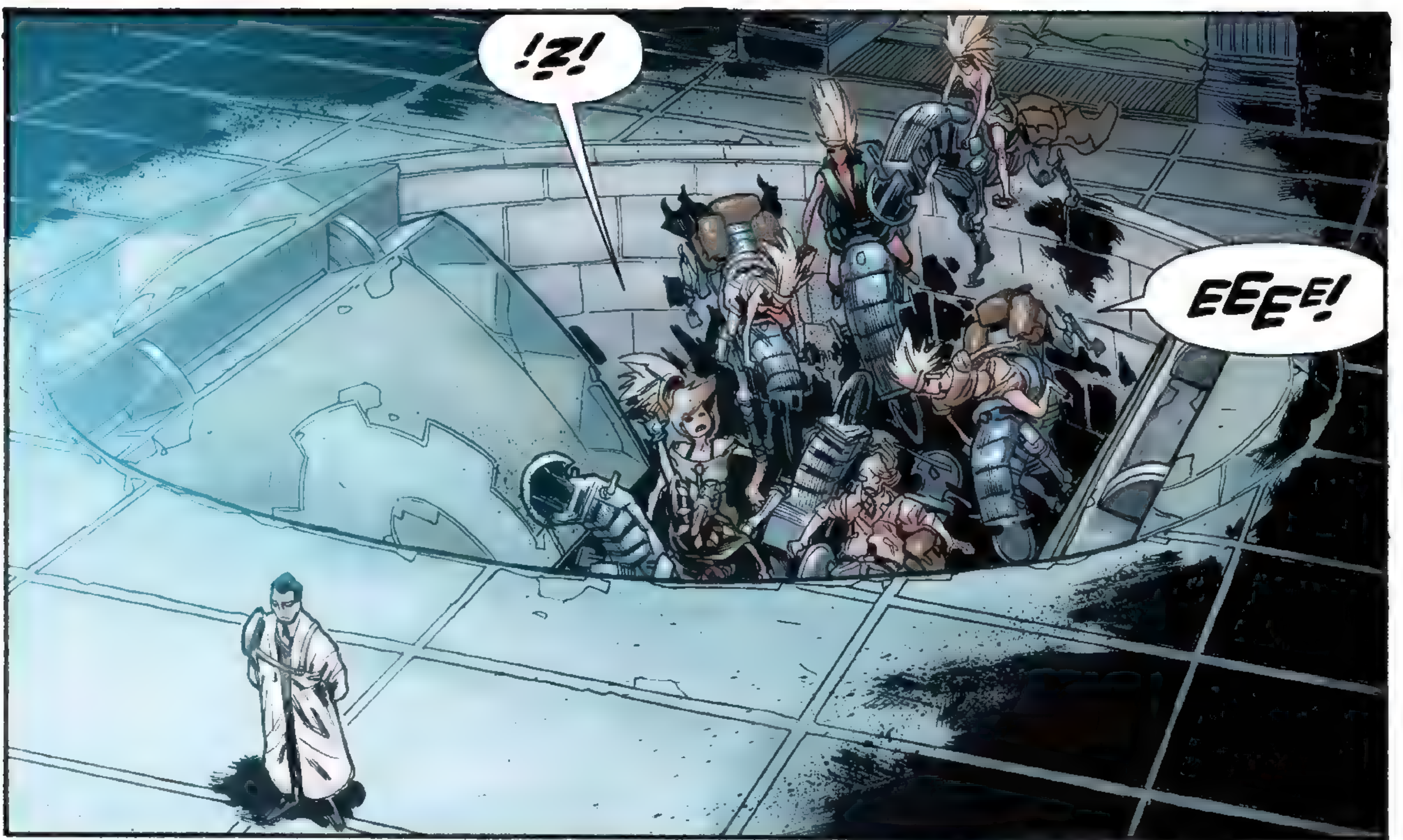




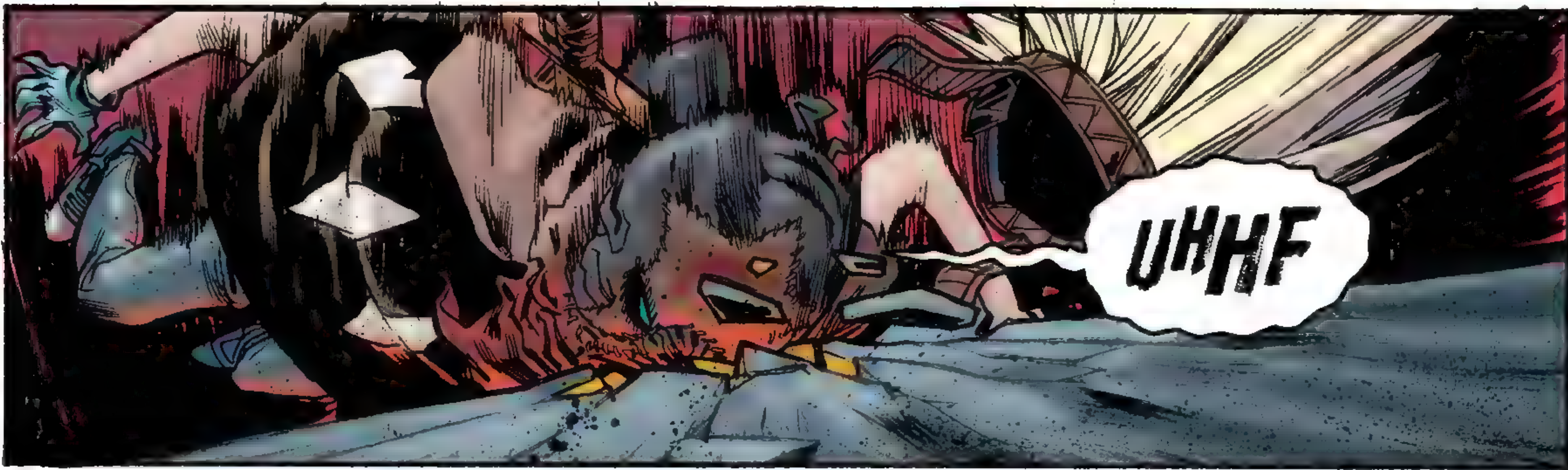
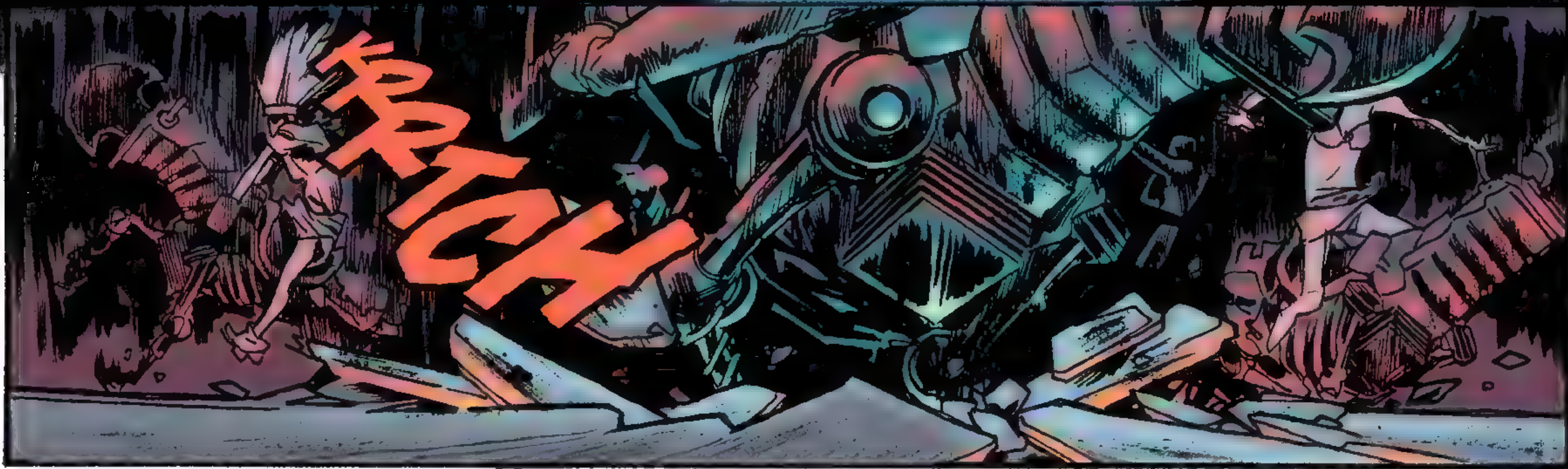




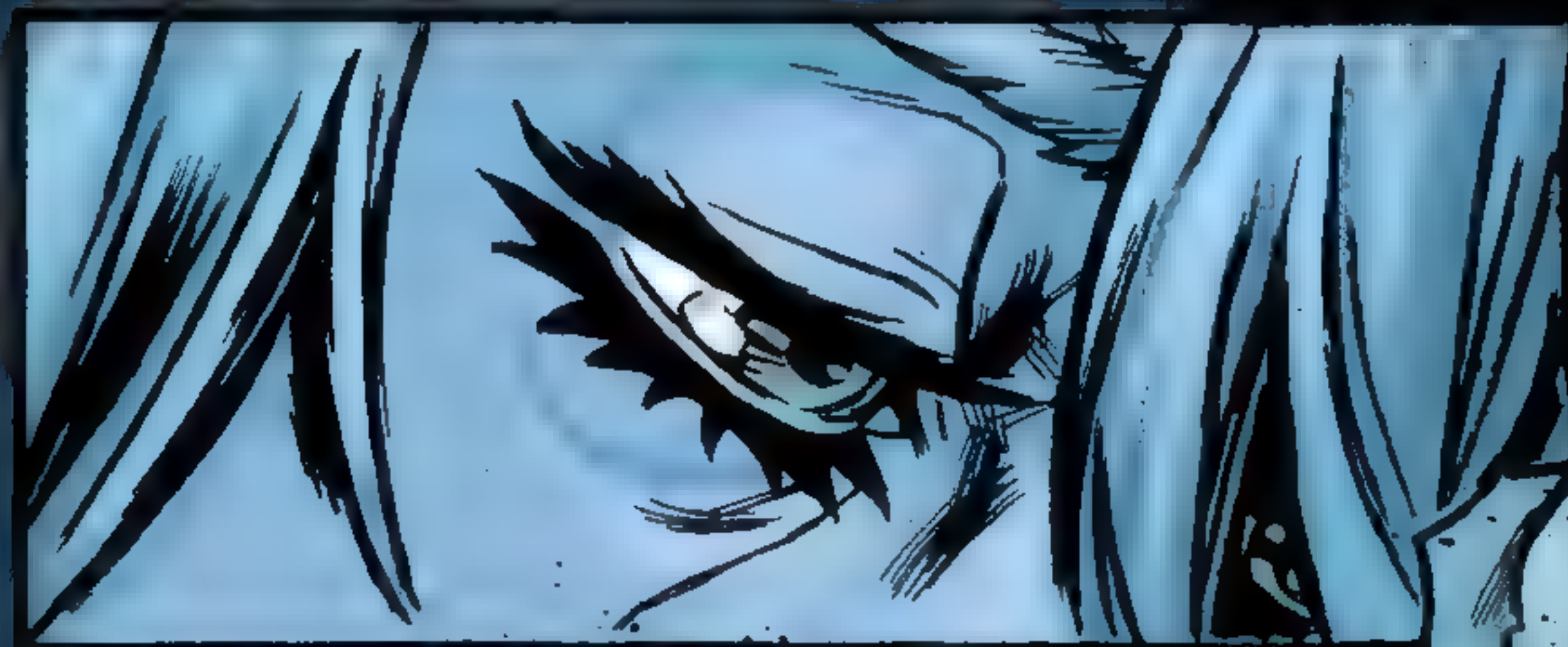












O-ORCHID?

A-ANYONE?



COME ON NOW. *SUMPH* LET'S GET UP, SHALL WE? IT'S ONLY A SCRATCH, SEE?

Uhhhh...



GRR-  
KK-K

W-WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

I'M HERE LAIKA. IT'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT...

NO-- I DON'T THINK IT IS.





WELCOME  
TO THE  
DUNGEONS  
OF FORTRESS  
PENUEL,  
THE *SLAVE*  
LEVEL.

A  
FITTING  
SITE TO  
BRING  
THIS  
MATTER  
TO AN  
END.



*HAH!*  
LOOK WHAT  
THE *SHADOW*  
*REBELS* HAVE SENT  
TO FACE THE MIGHT  
OF TOMO WOLFE!  
A HANDFUL OF  
PITIFUL VALK  
*WHORES.*

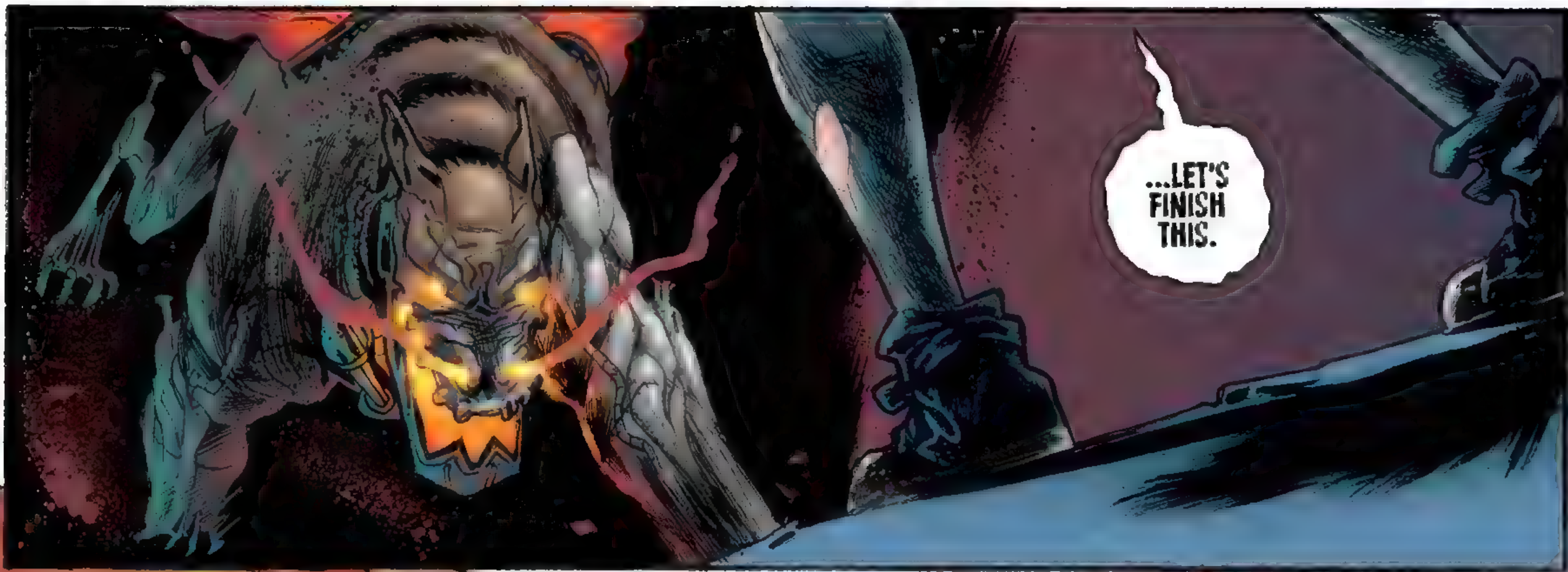


COME  
DOWN HERE  
AND WE'LL  
SHOW YOU HOW  
PITIFUL VALK  
WHORES  
FIGHT...

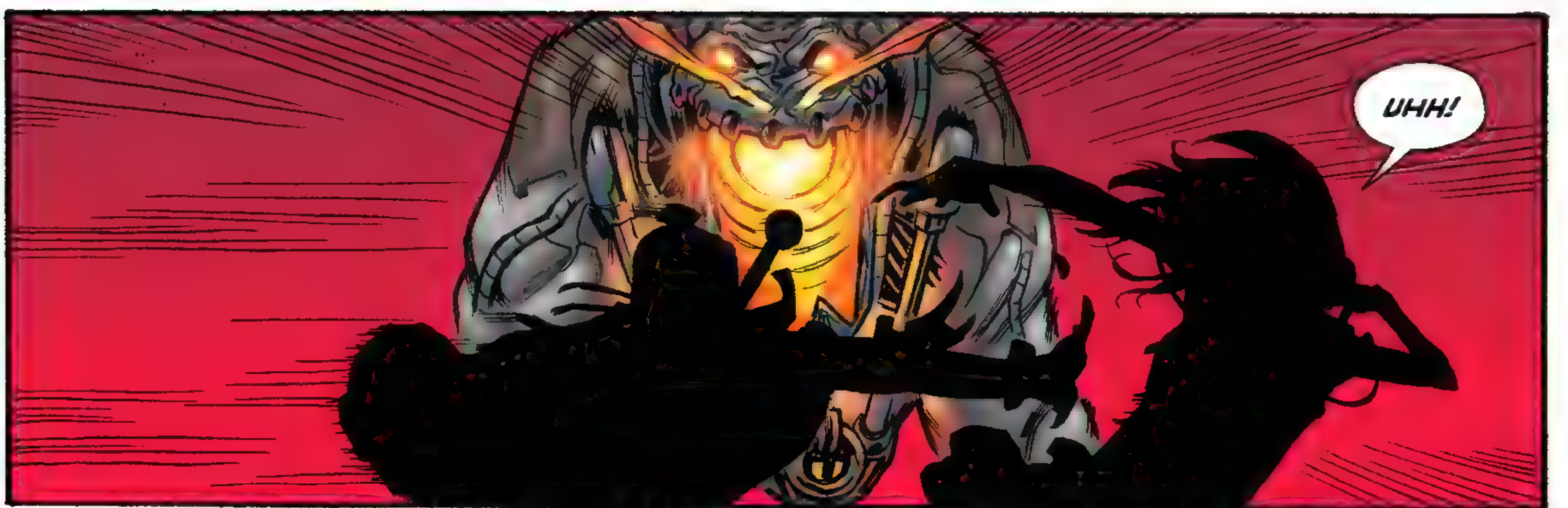
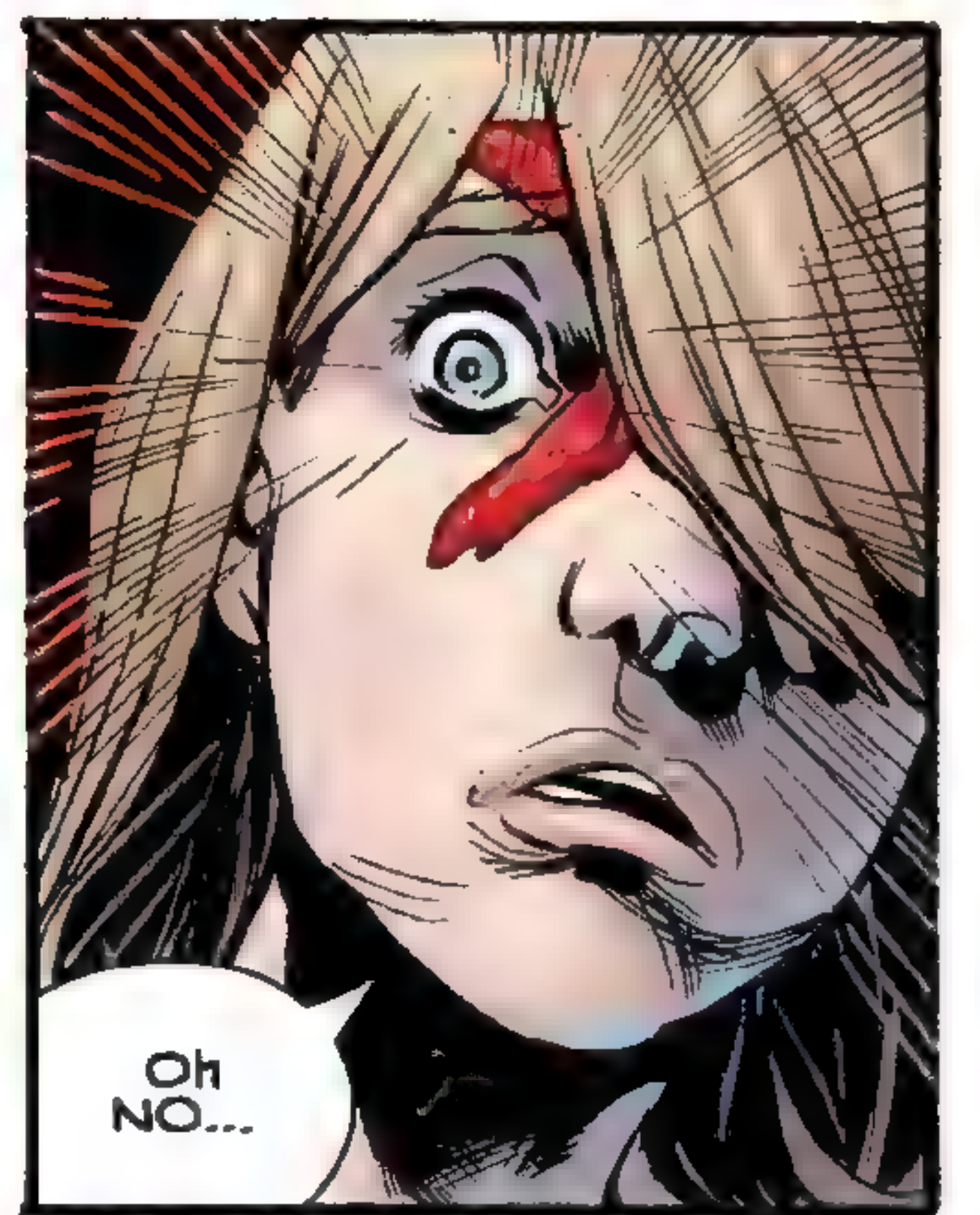




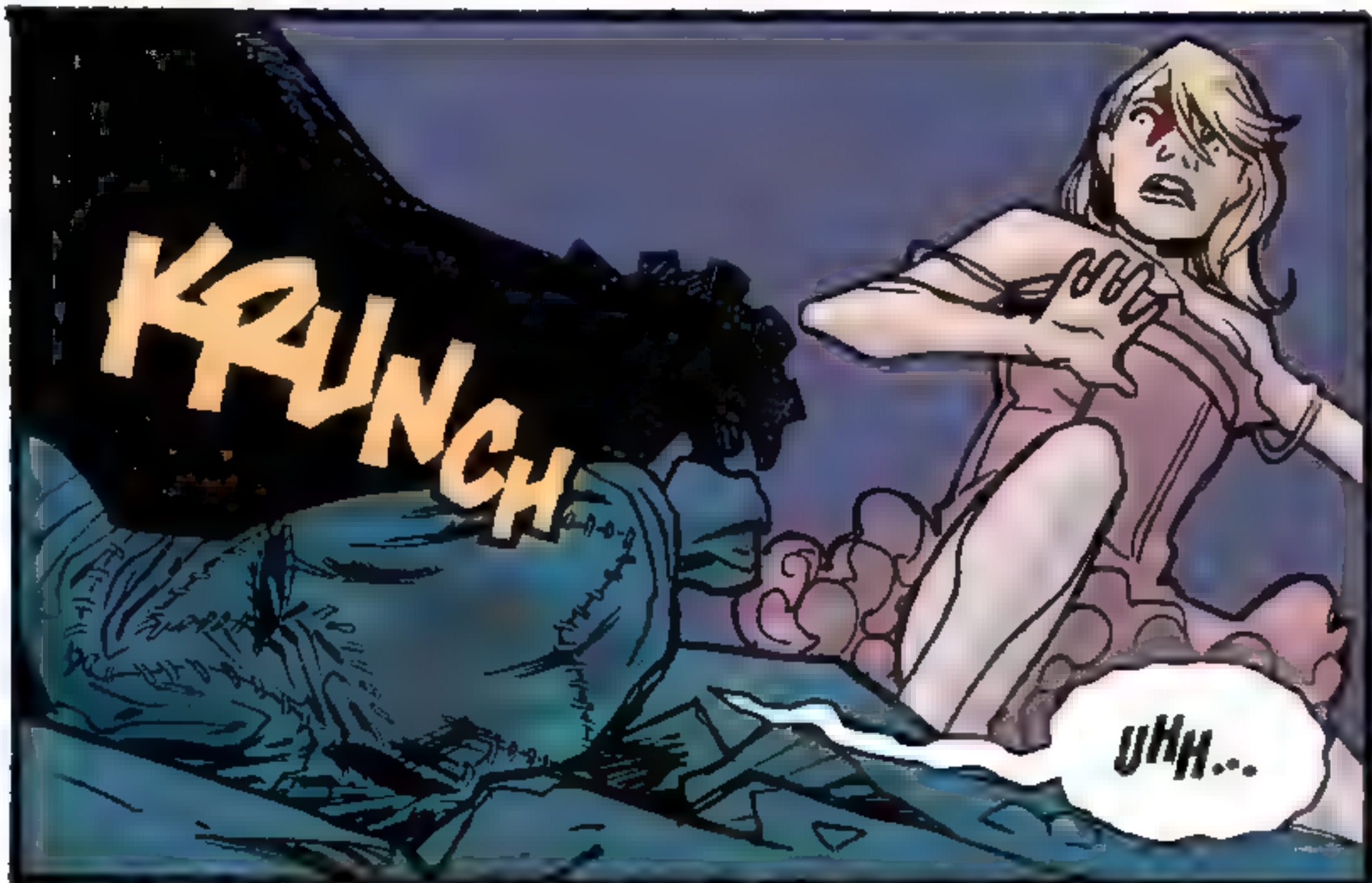
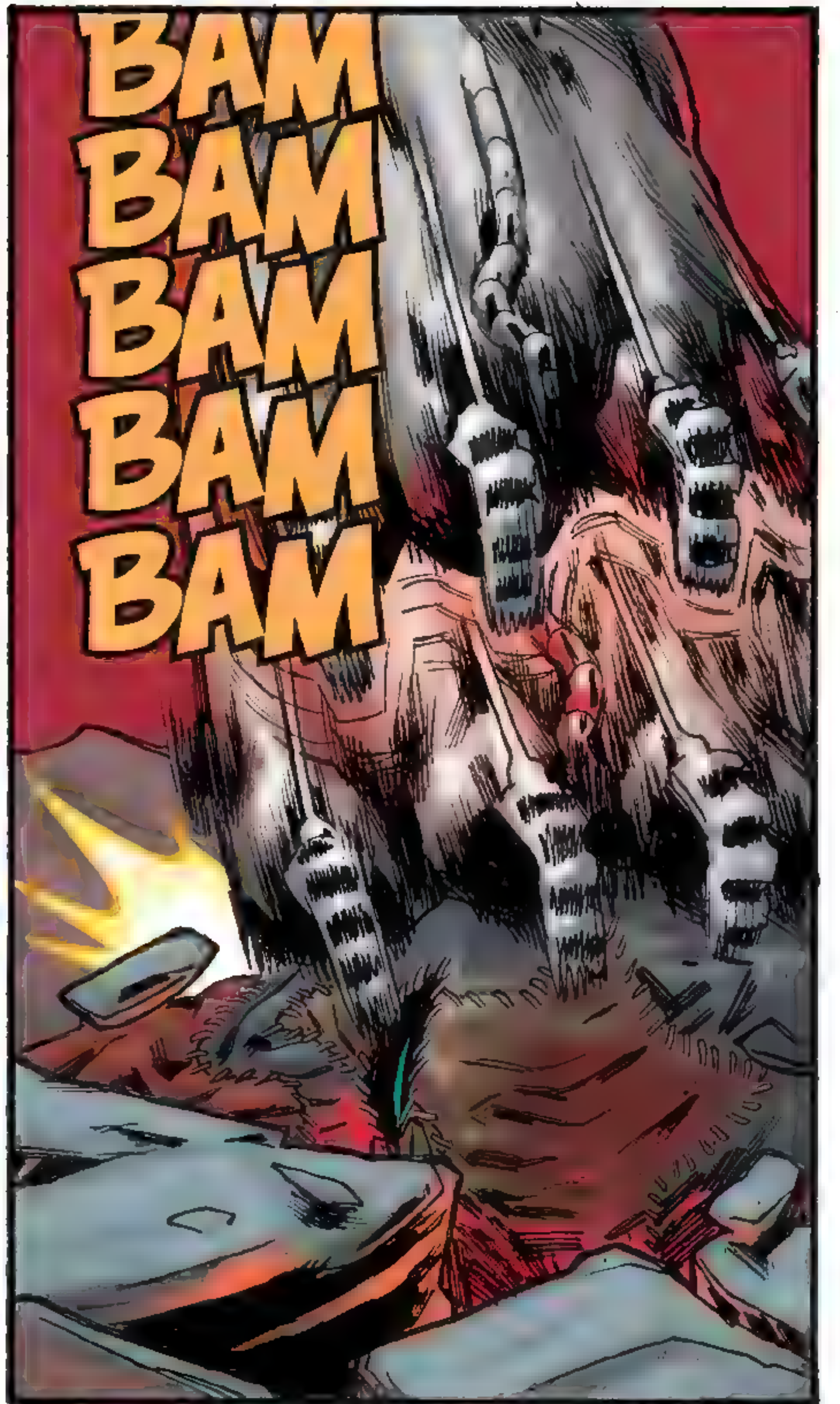








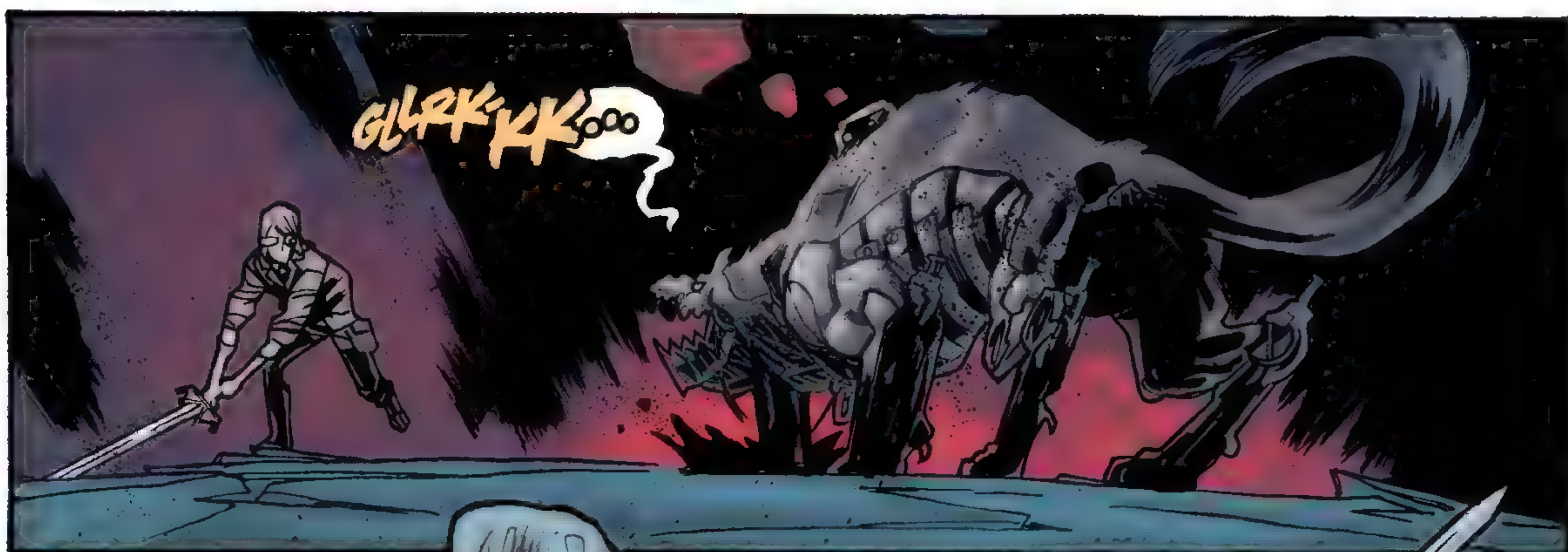
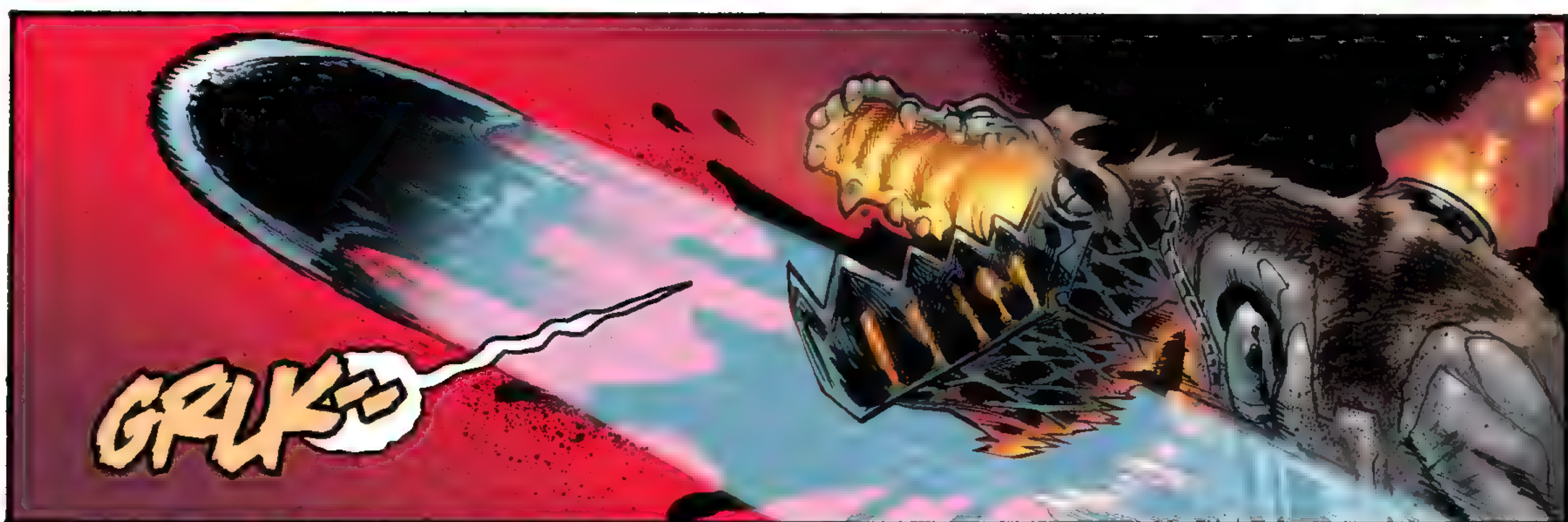




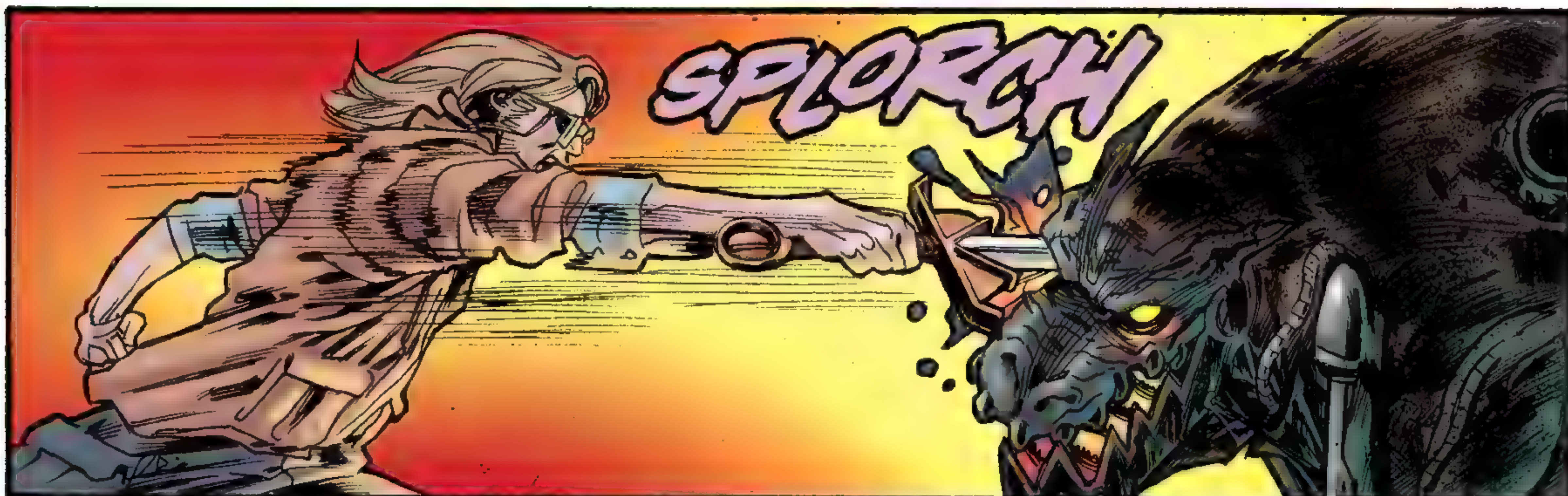




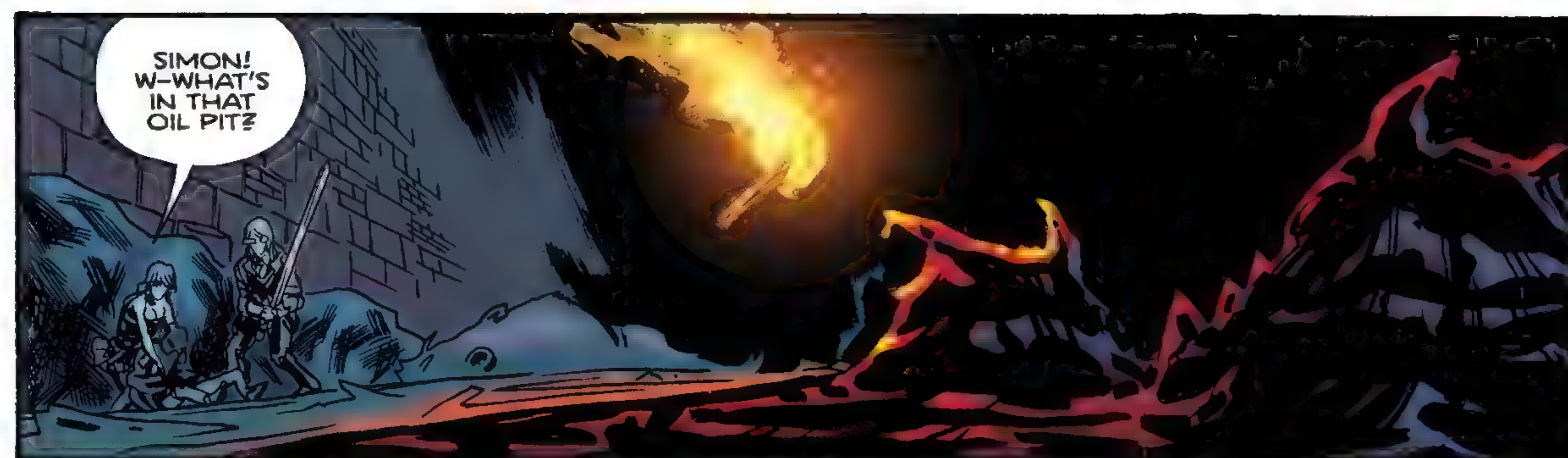
























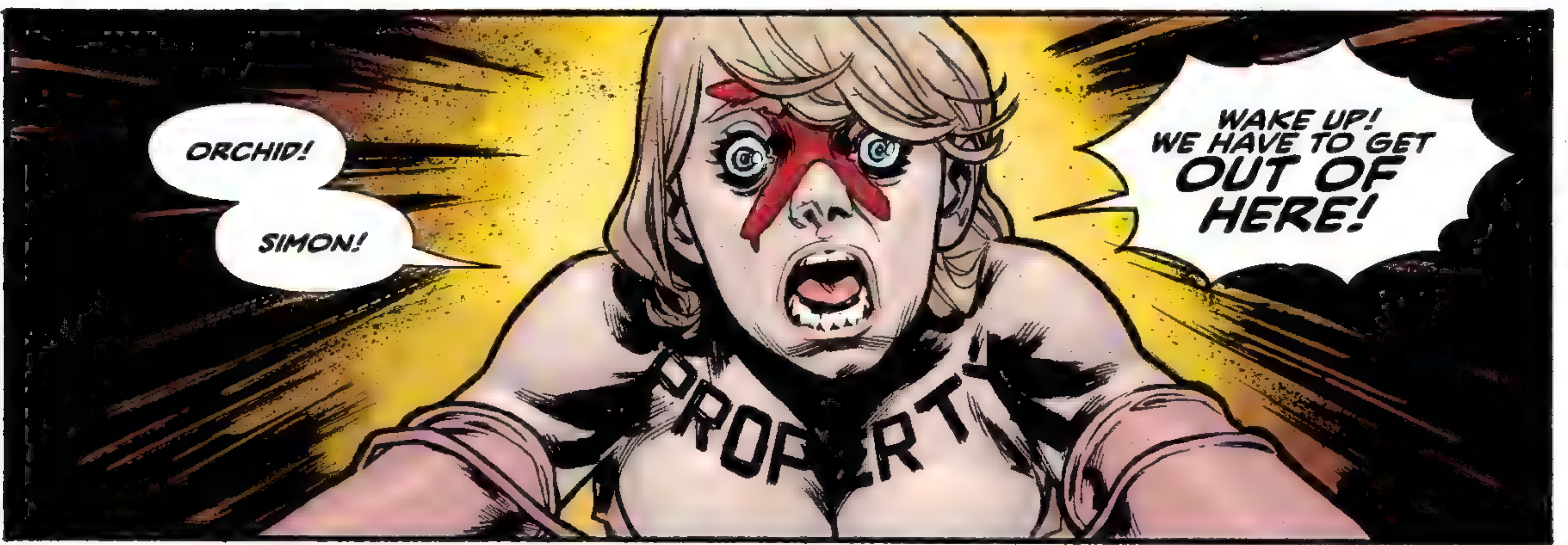
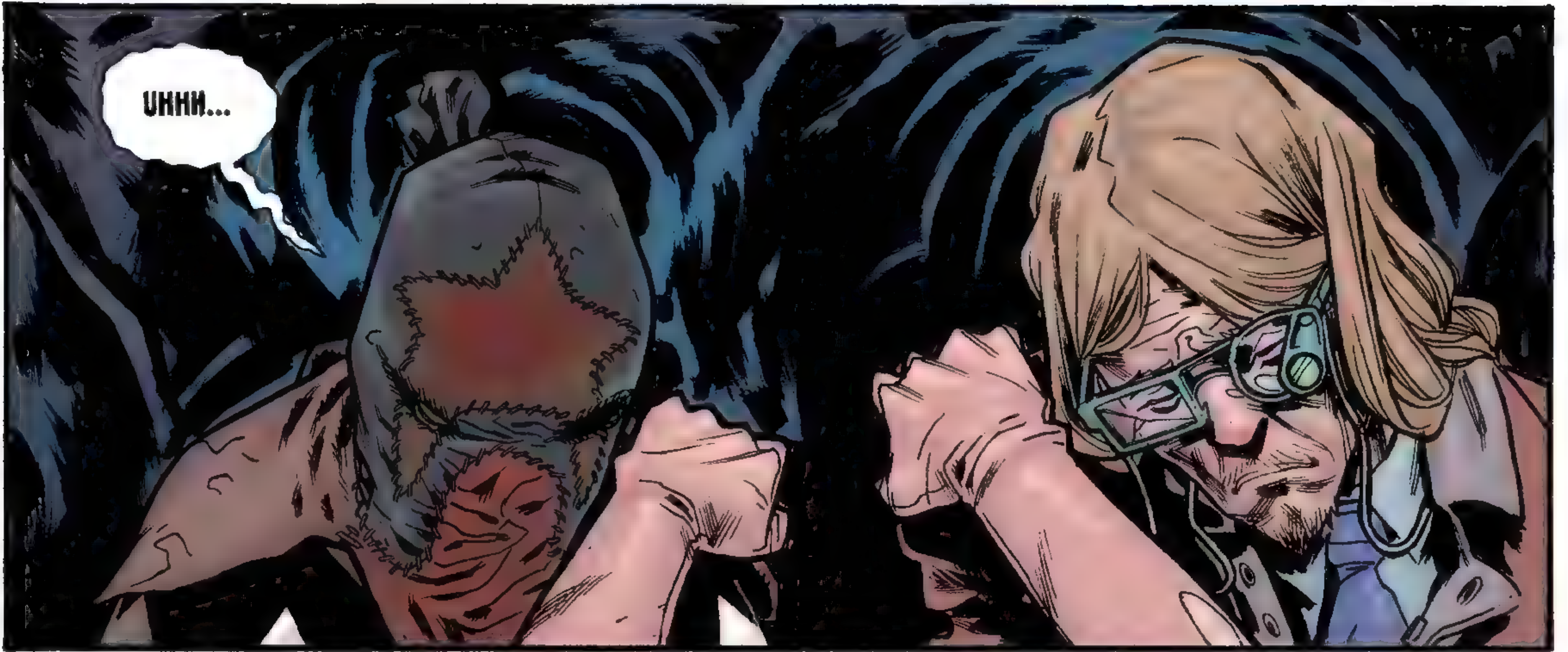




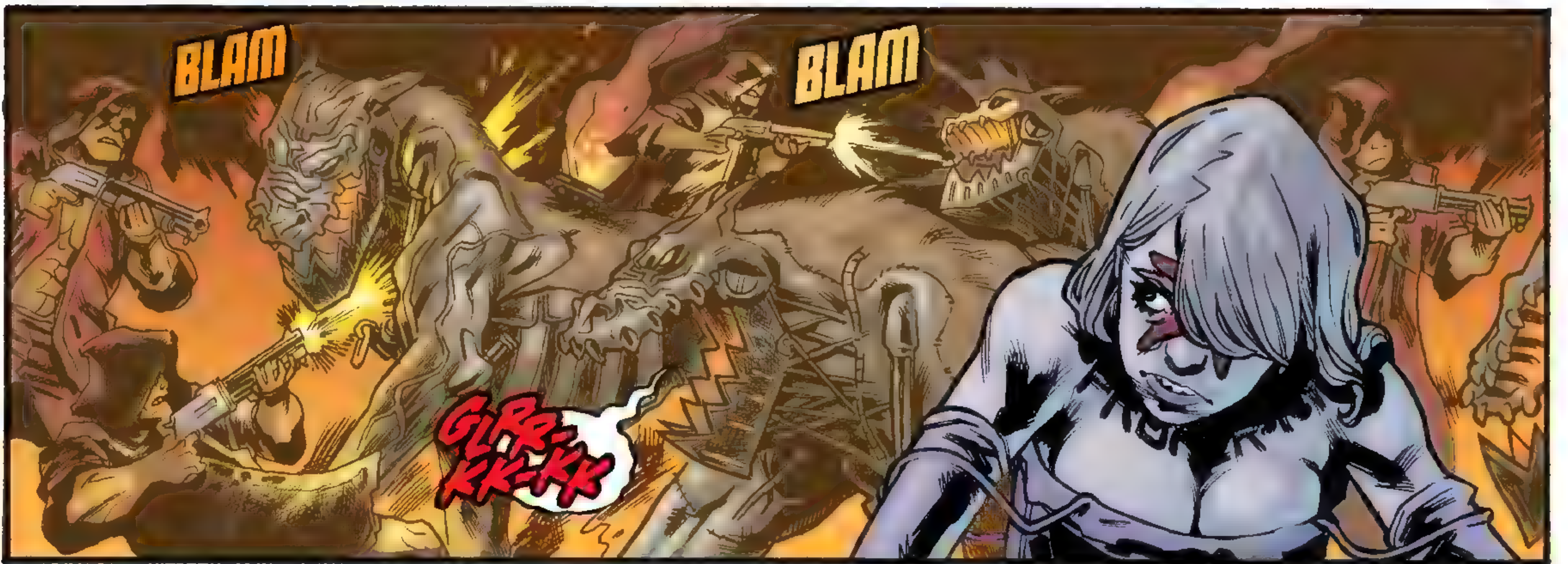
















THAT MONSTER BARRABAS IS KILLING MY SIRE VARASHEEN! STOP HIM, WESTIN...

...BEFORE HE COMES UP *HERE!*

MY, MY. FIRST, IT'S *DON* WESTIN. AND DON'T WORRY.

BARRABAS WON'T LEAVE THIS ROOM ALIVE.



LAIKA... IS SIMON ALIVE?

YES, BUT--

THEN GET HIM OUT OF HERE BEFORE THEY TURN ON US!

HOW?! THIS IS CRAZY!

SFFT



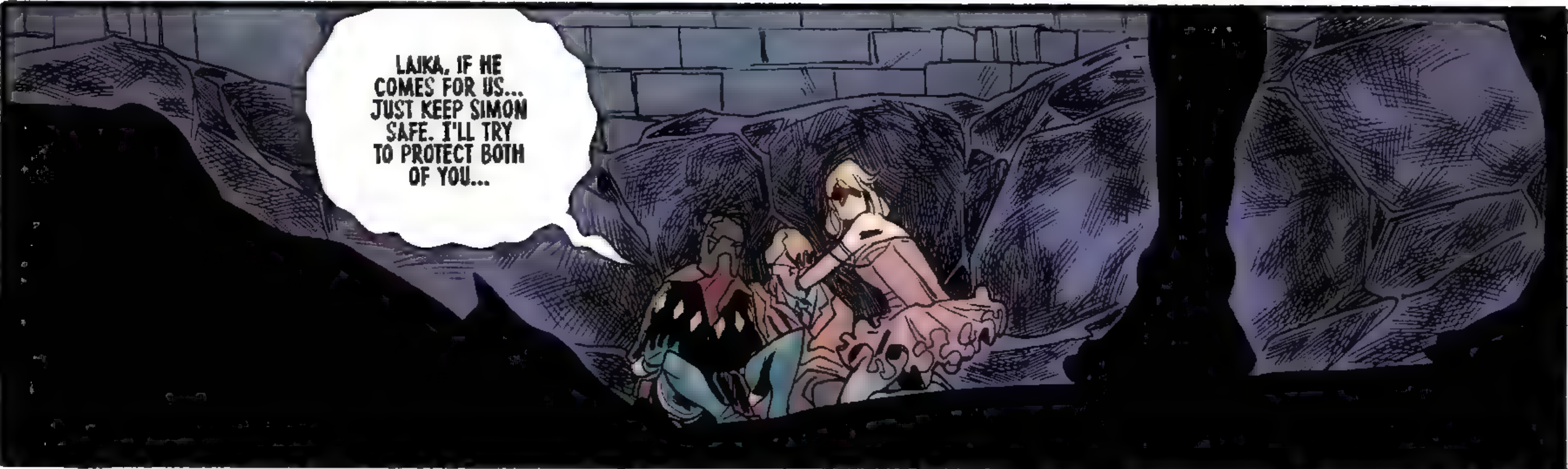
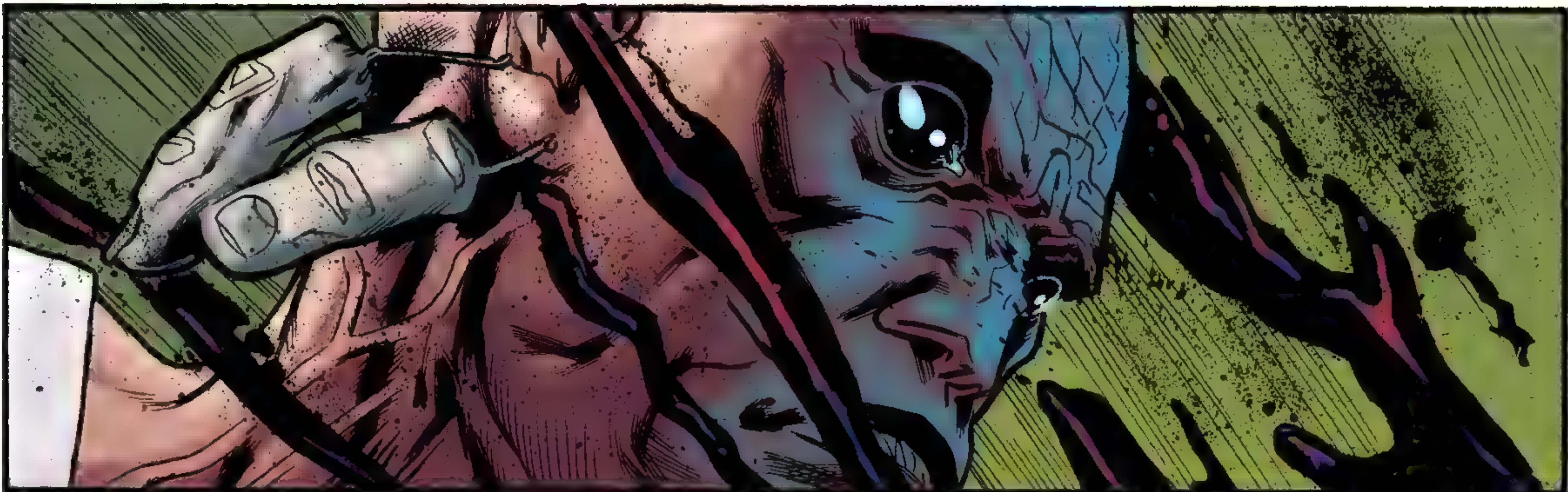
BLAM

ARKK  
KK-GRK

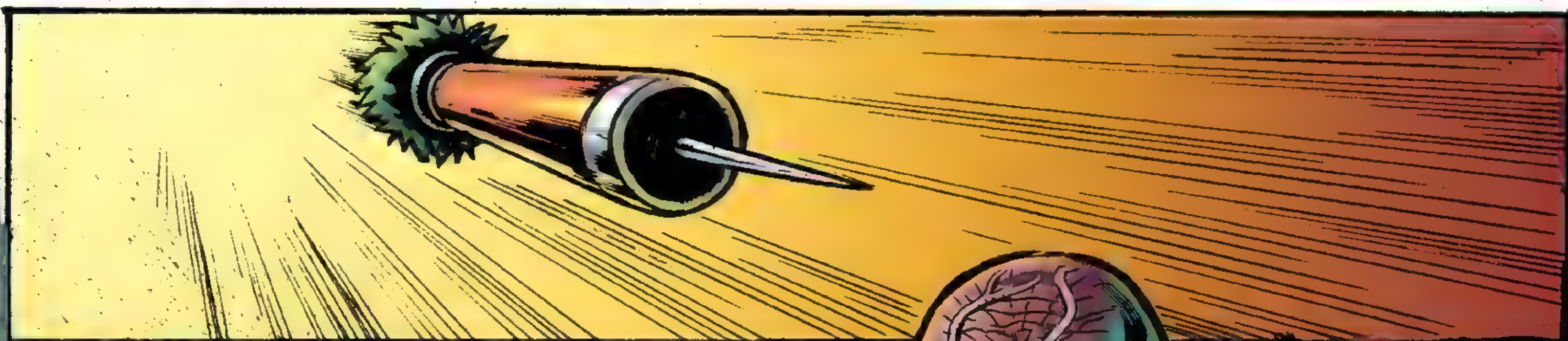
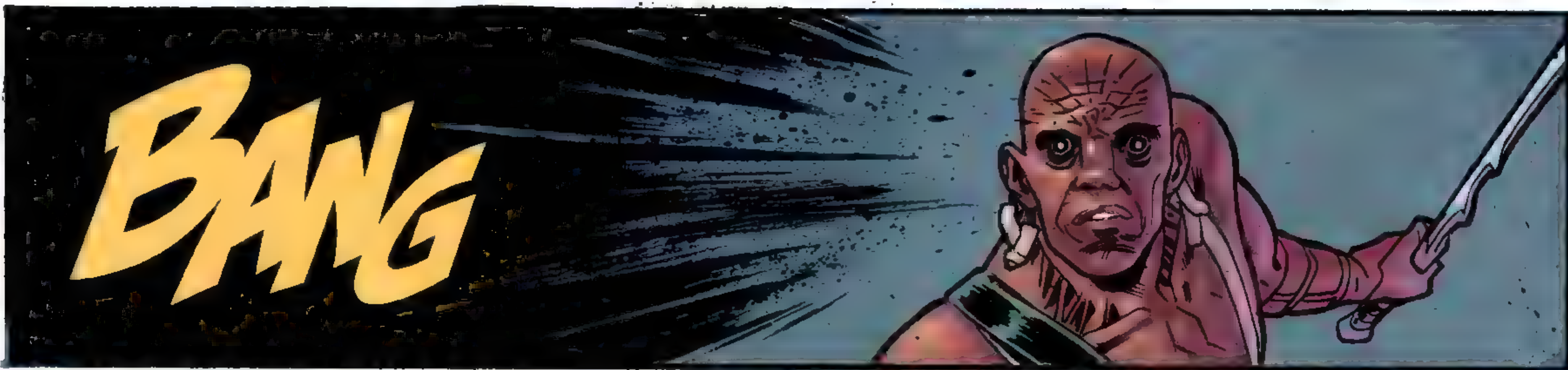




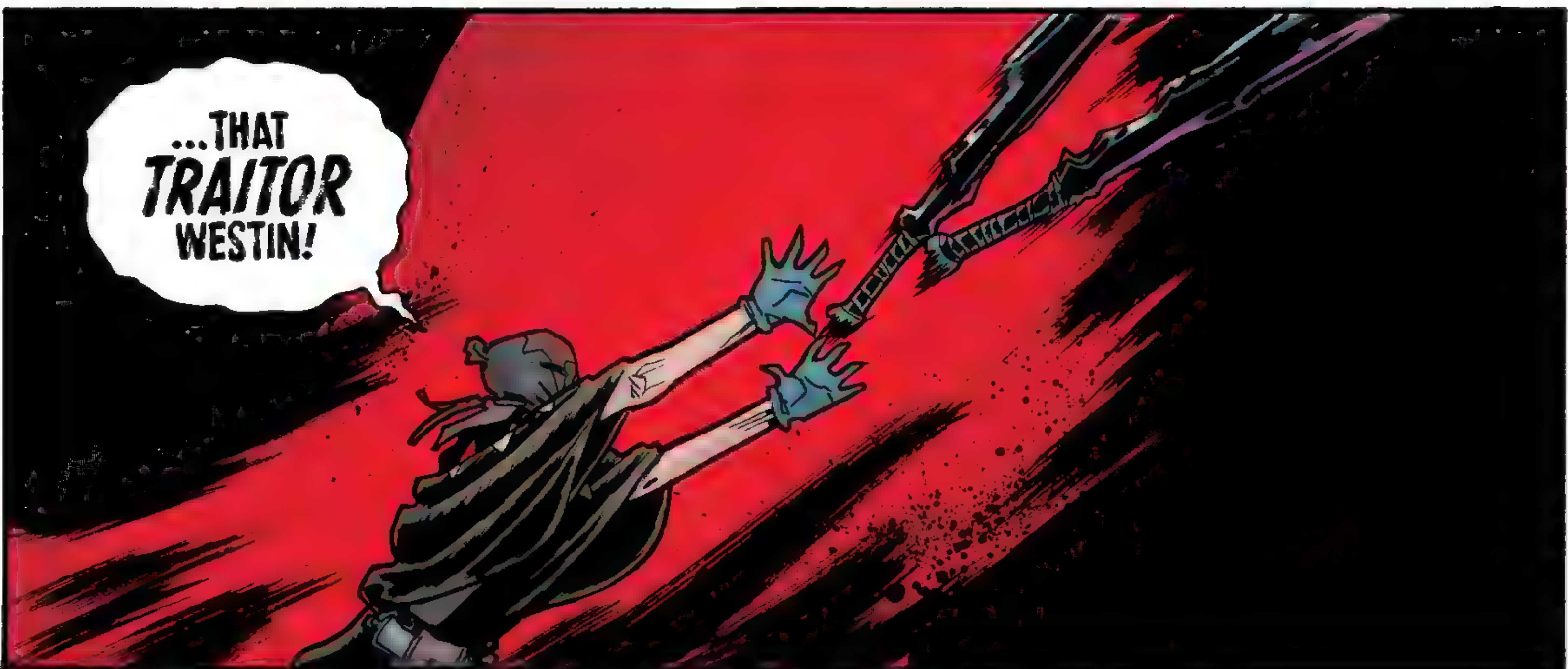




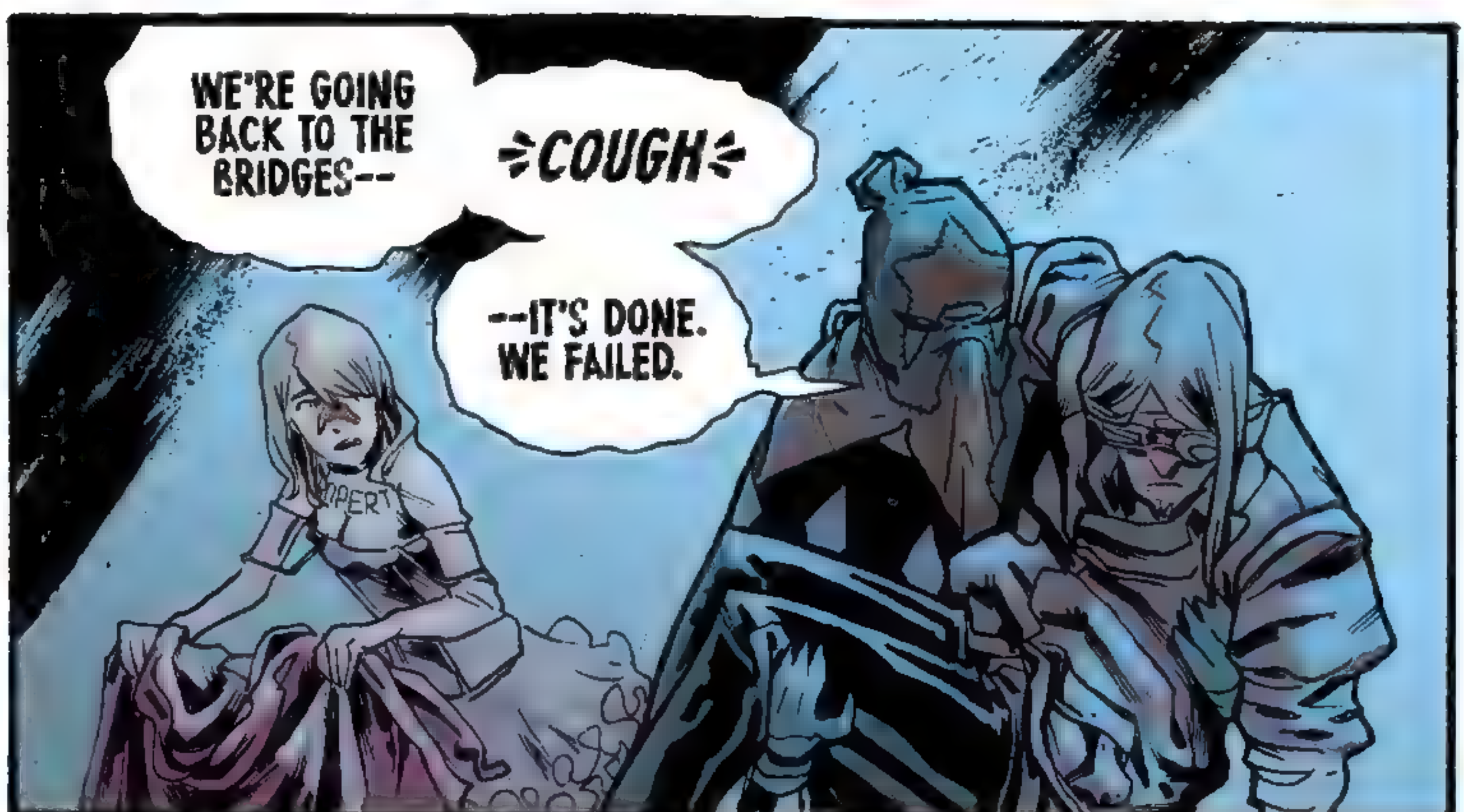
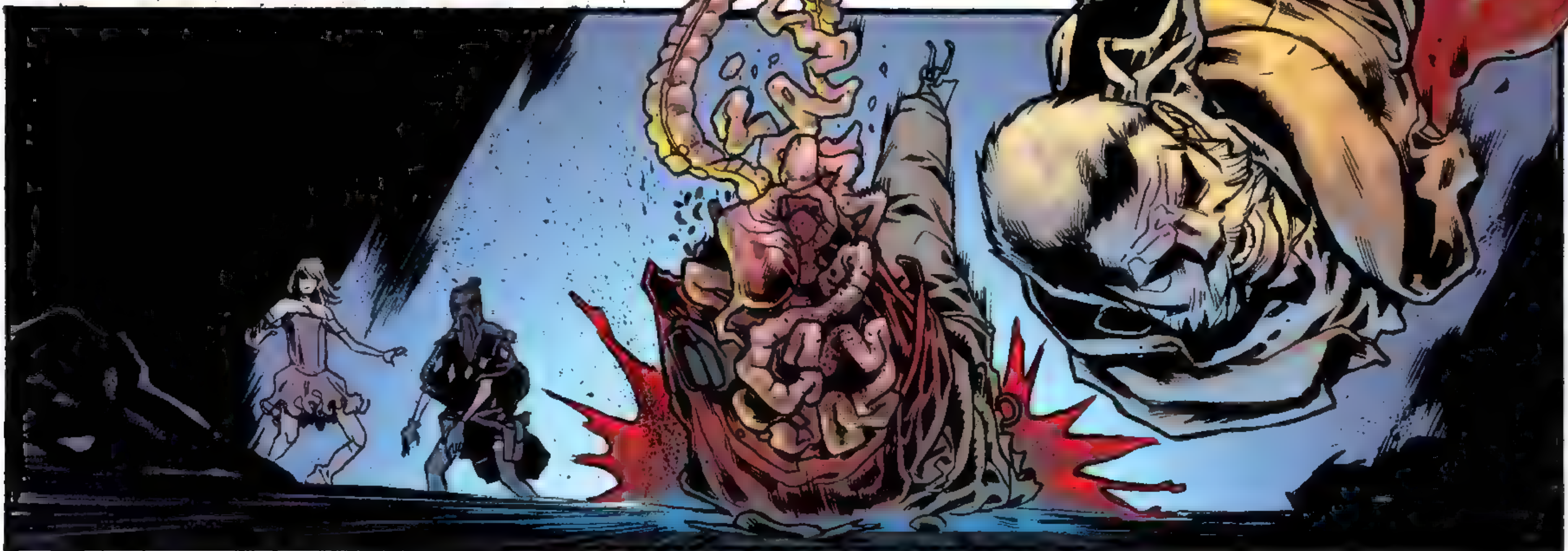




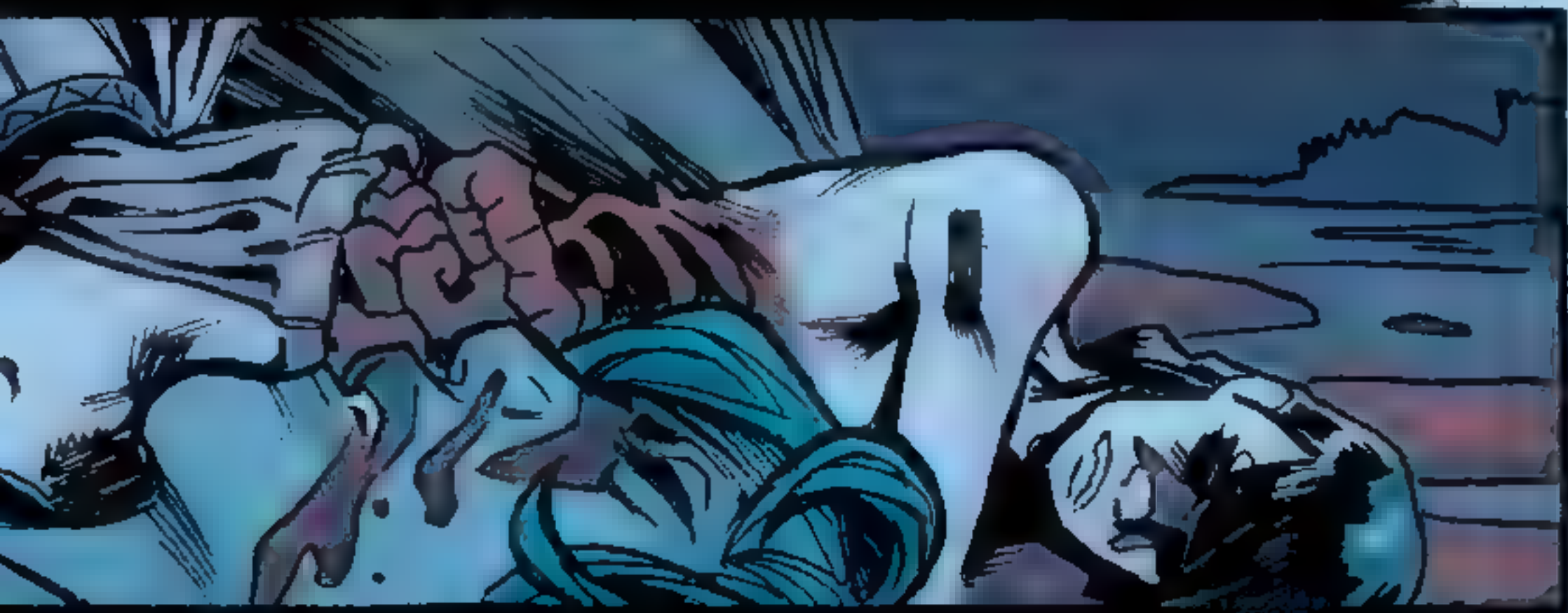






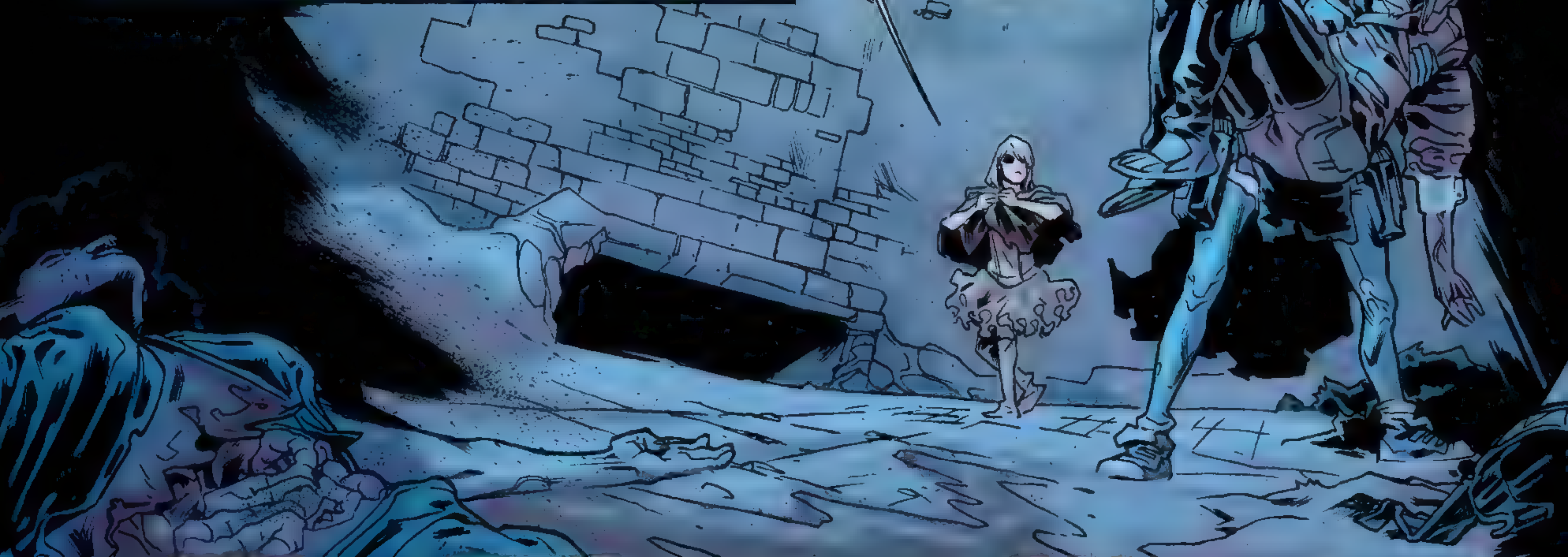






WE'RE JUST  
LEAVING?

THE VALKS  
ARE DEAD, LAIKA.  
SIMON'S BADLY HURT.  
≡COUGH≡ AND FOR  
WHAT? THEY FOLLOWED  
ME, SACRIFICED  
THEMSELVES FOR  
ME...ALL FOR  
NOTHING.



BUT YOU  
INSPIRED  
THEM--

I INSPIRED THEM  
TO THEIR DEATHS. LAIKA,  
≡COUGH COUGH≡ I-I CAN'T  
BEAT WOLFE ALONE. IT'S  
OVER. BUT MAYBE I CAN  
GET YOU AND SIMON  
TO SAFETY...

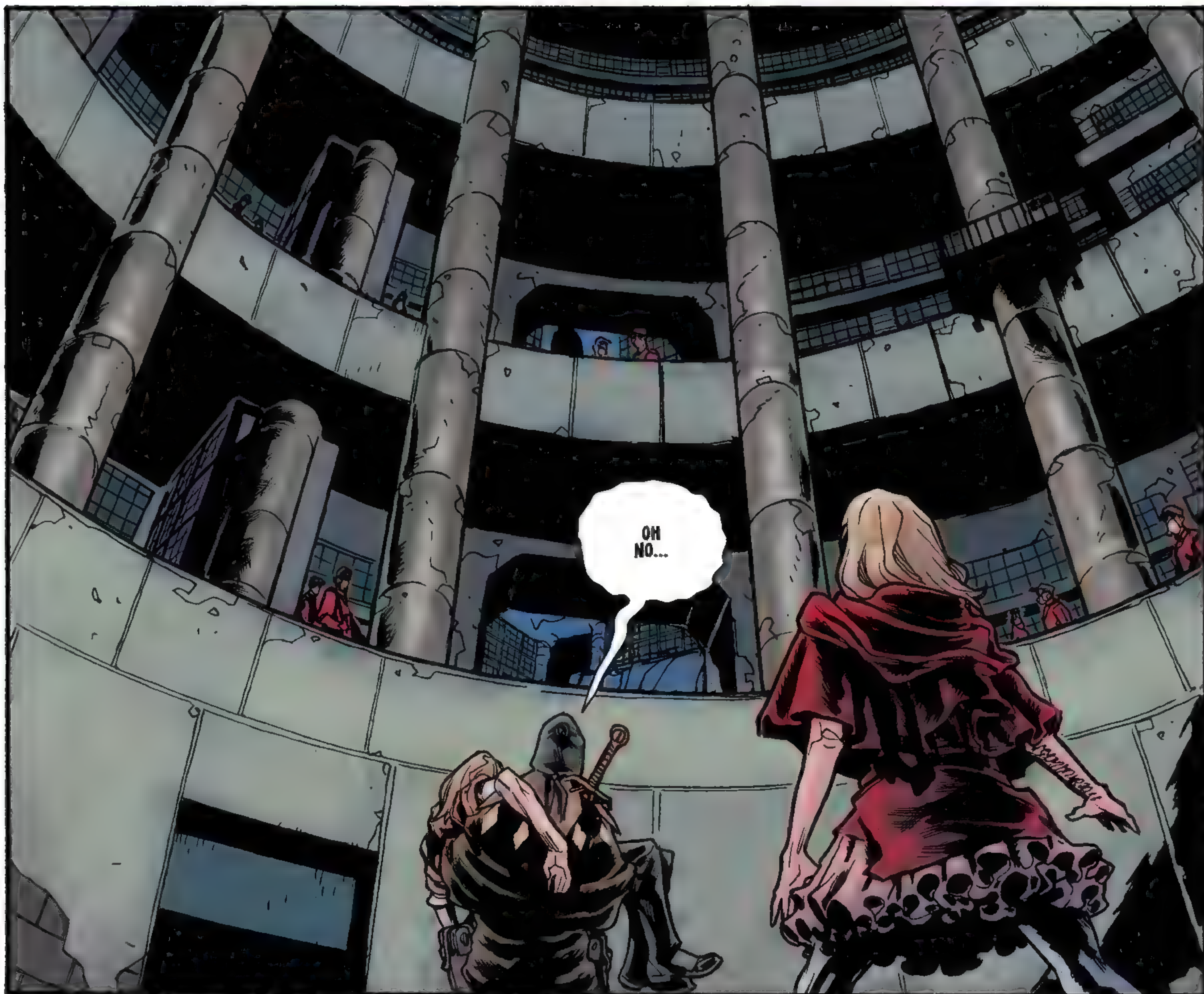
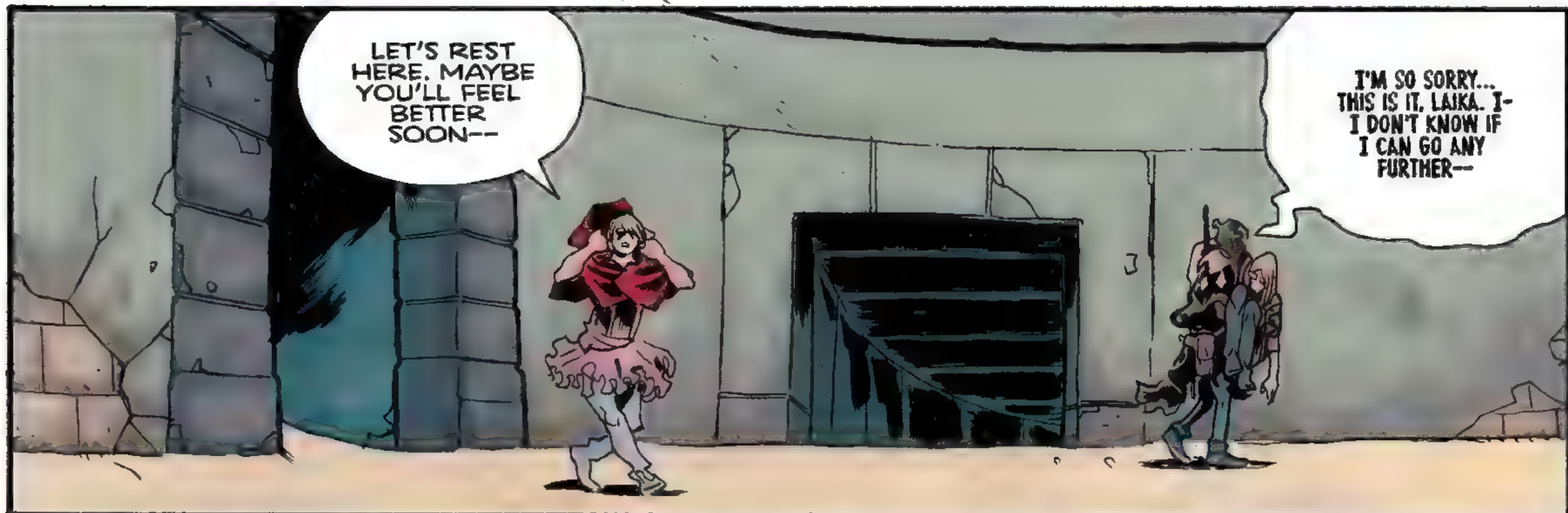
AND THE  
ONLY WAY OUT...  
IS DOWN.



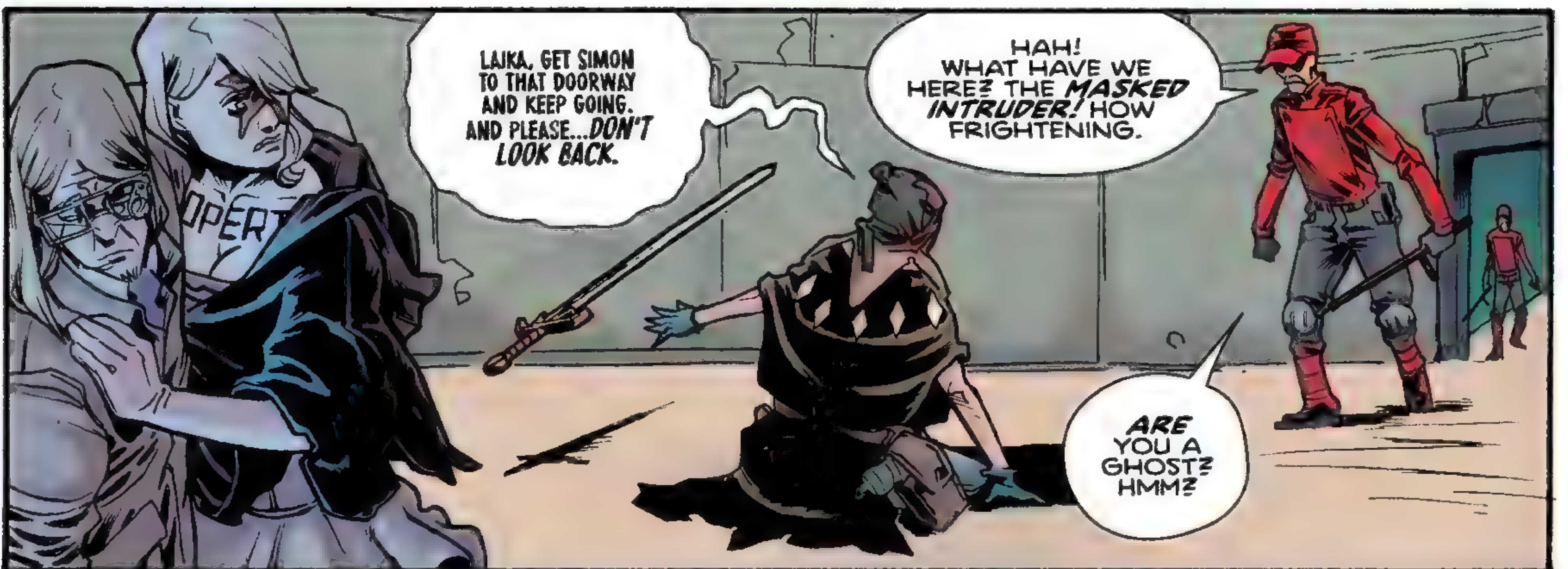
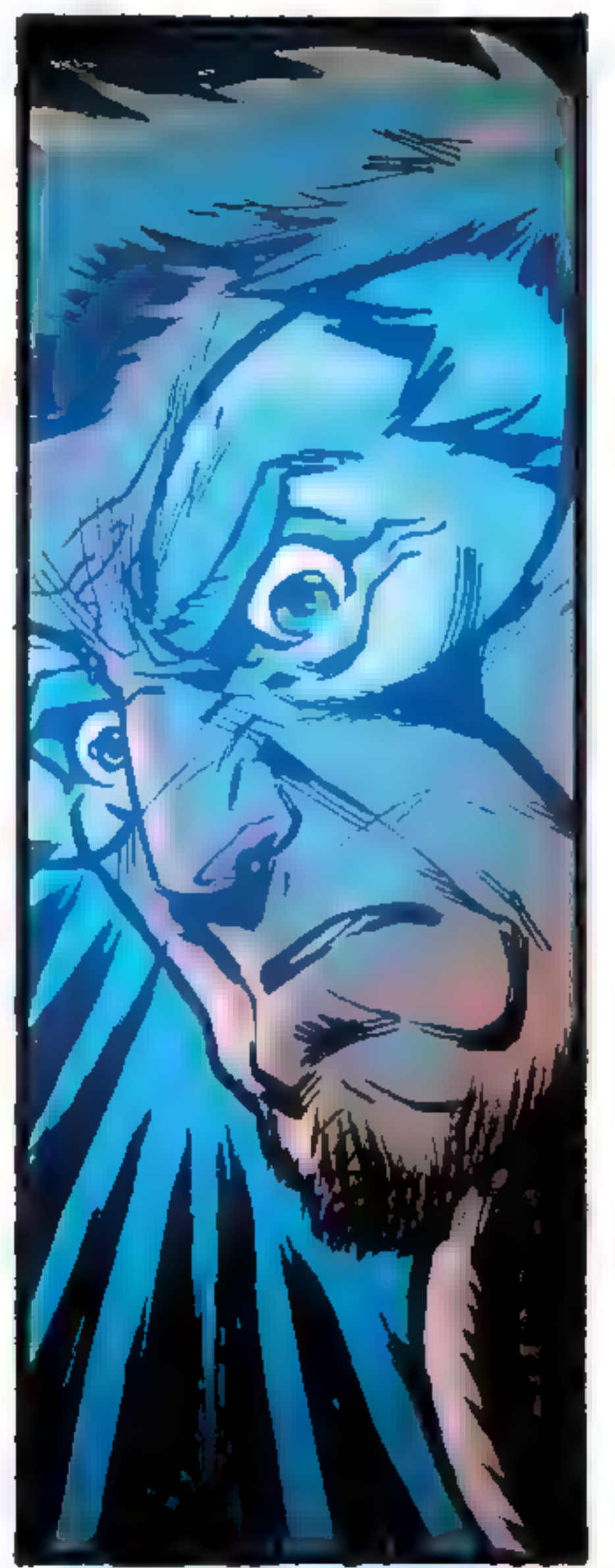
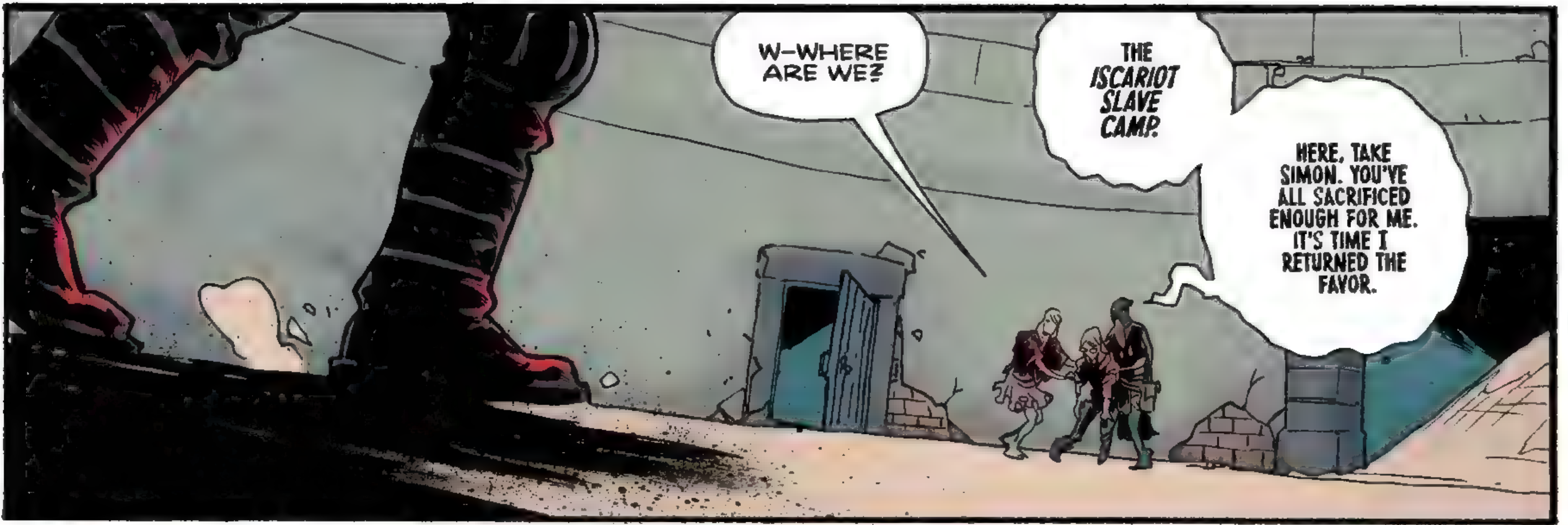




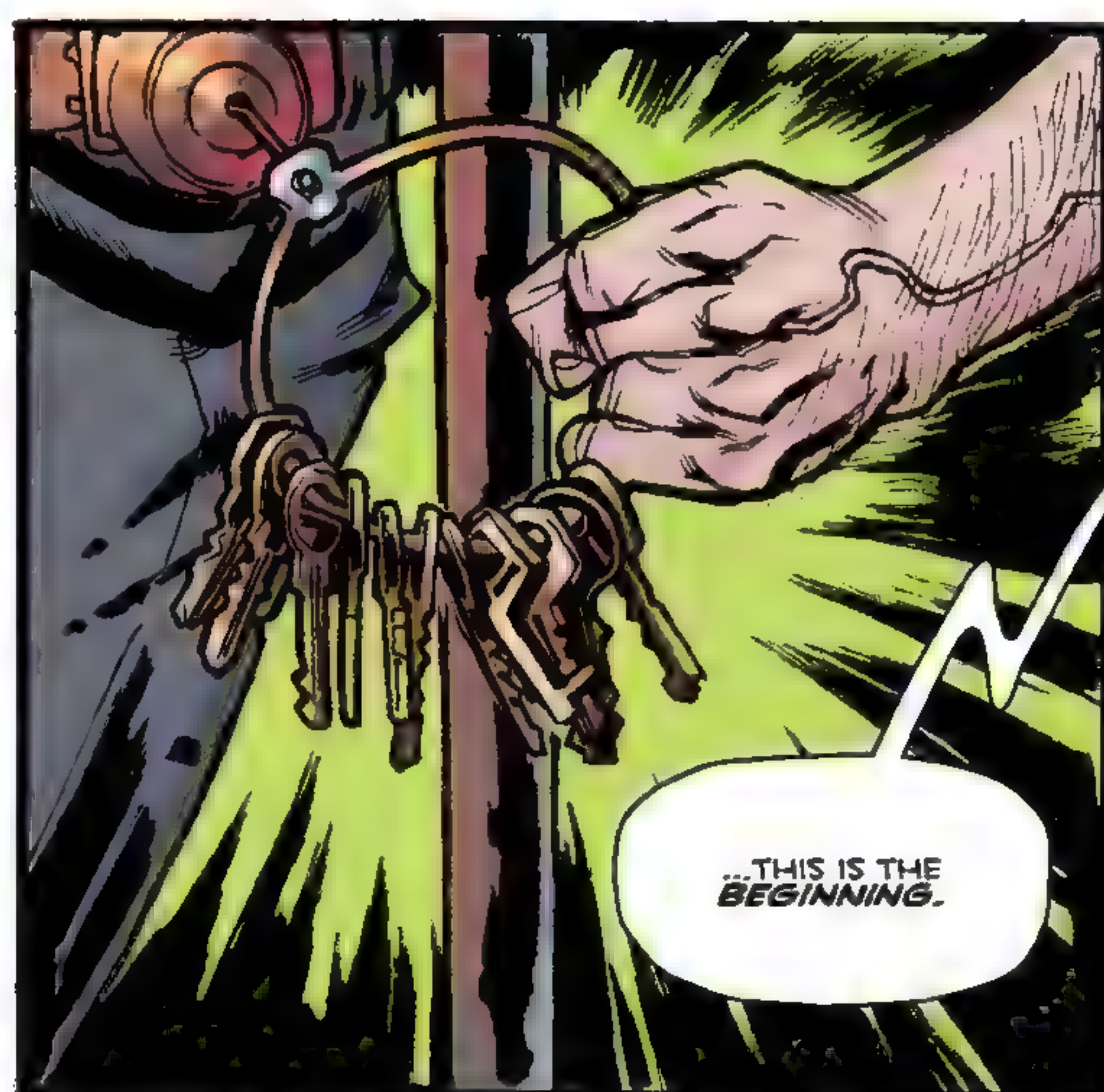








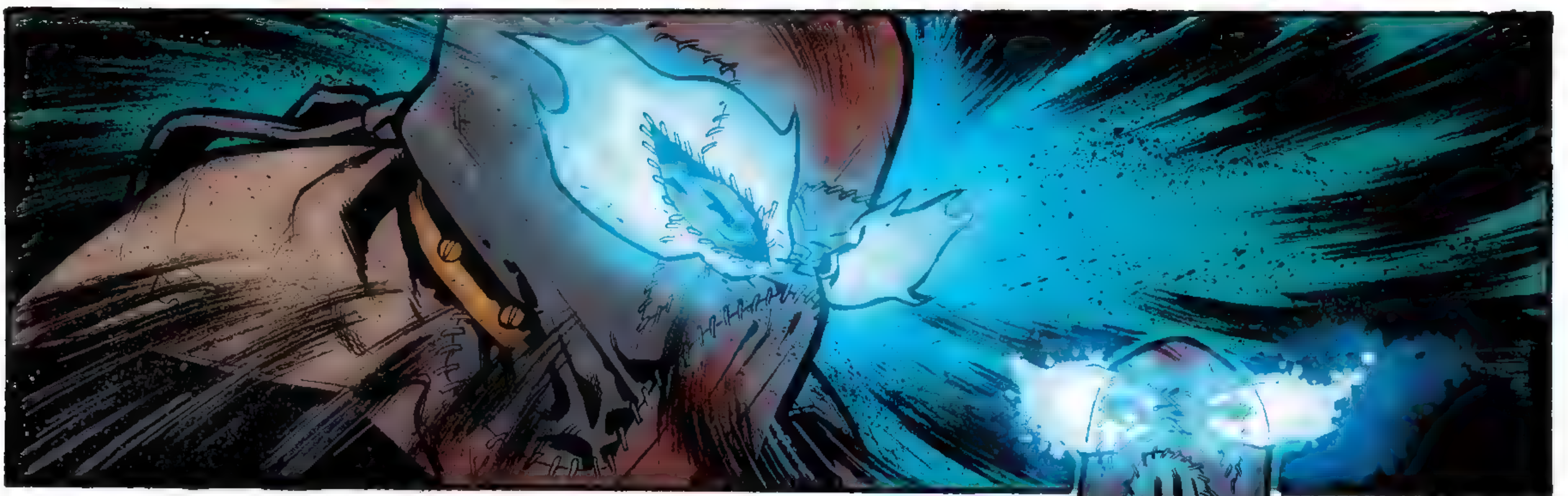




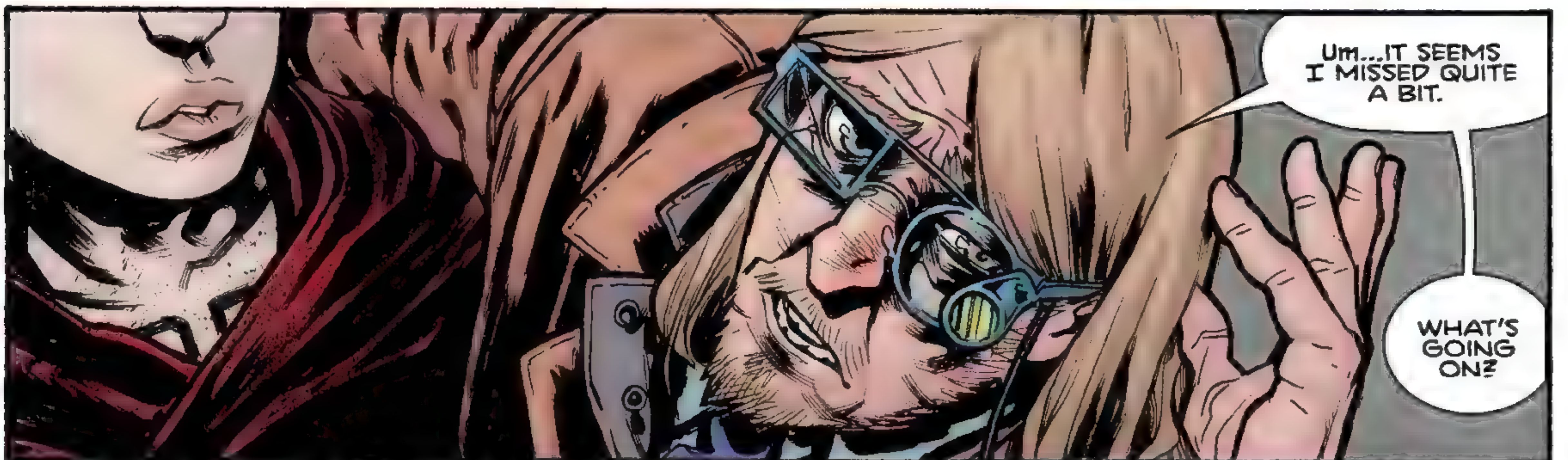




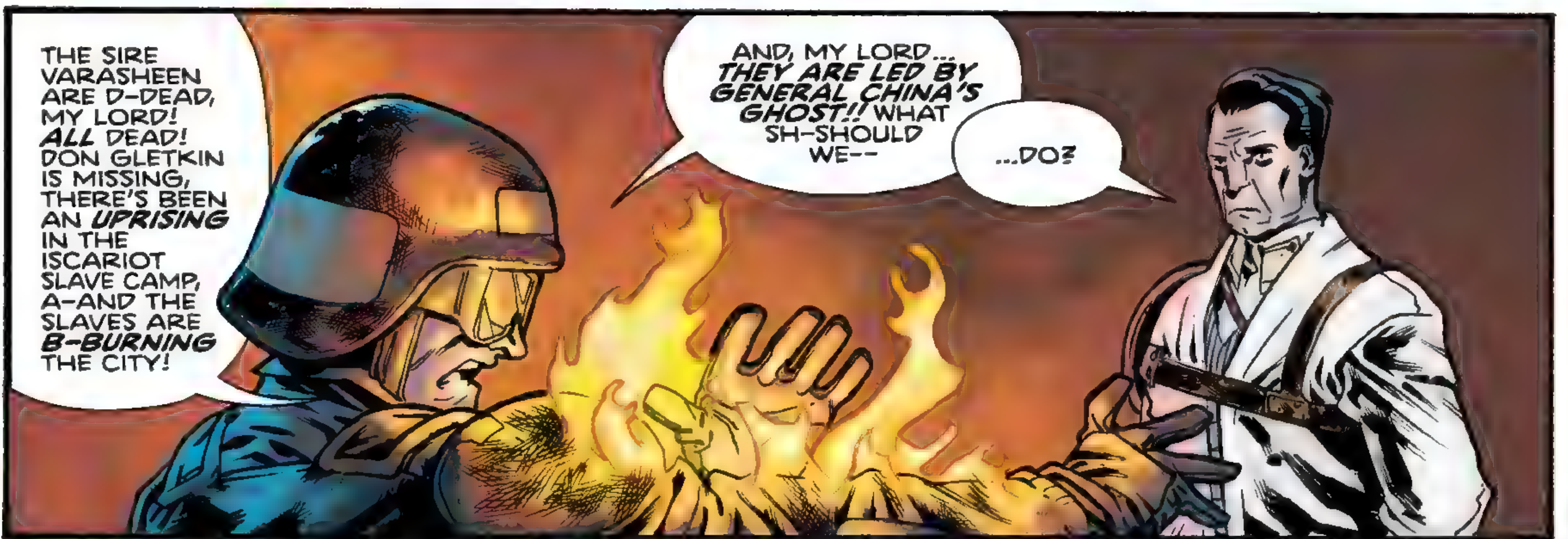
















...ESPECIALLY  
**SUPERSTITIOUS  
IMBECILES** LIKE  
YOU!



PENUEL IS  
FORFEIT. PREPARE  
**OPERATION  
PHOENIX!** GO  
TO YOUR **FINAL  
STATIONS!**



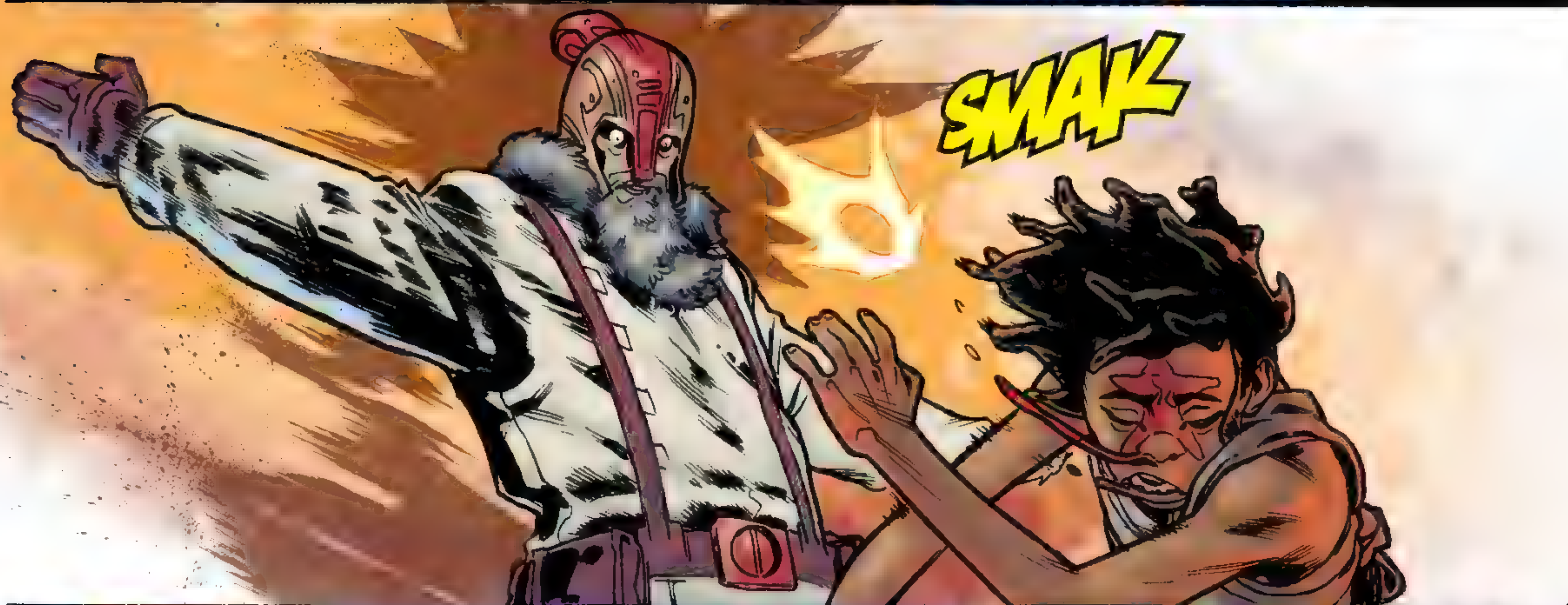
AND...  
RELEASE THE  
**CANNIBAL  
GUARDS.**



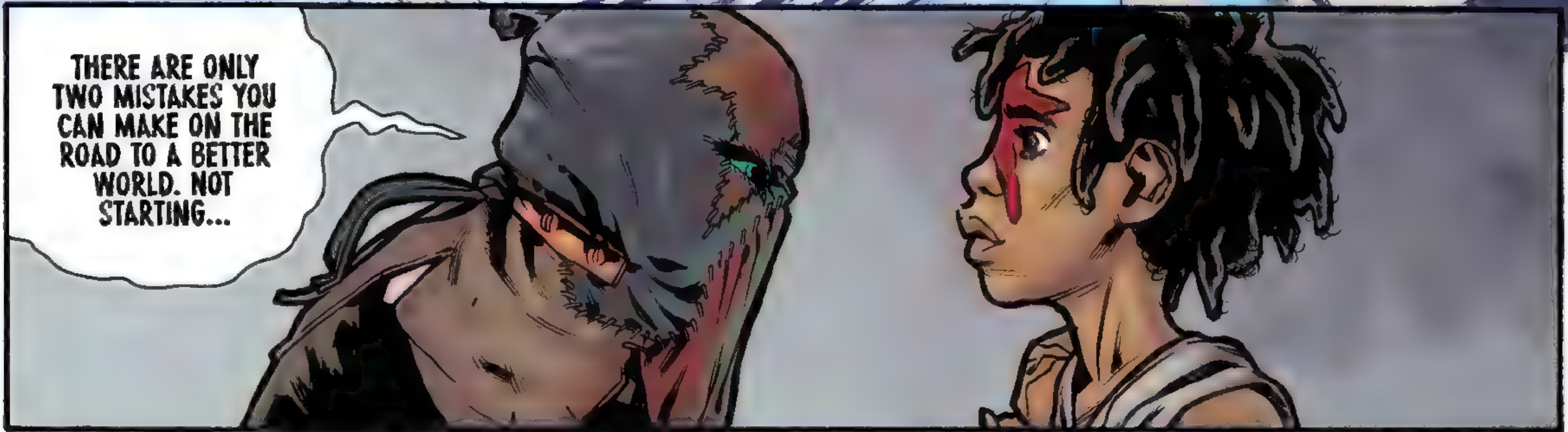
I WILL NO  
LONGER SIT IN THE  
TOWERS OF PENUEL--  
I WILL BRING THE  
TOWERS OF PENUEL  
TO OUR ENEMIES!  
**UNTETHER THE  
MOTHER  
SPIDERS!**

WHAT THESE  
BRIDGE SCUM AND  
THEIR "GHOSTLY"  
LEADER DON'T  
KNOW IS... **THIS  
FORTRESS IS A  
WEAPON.**

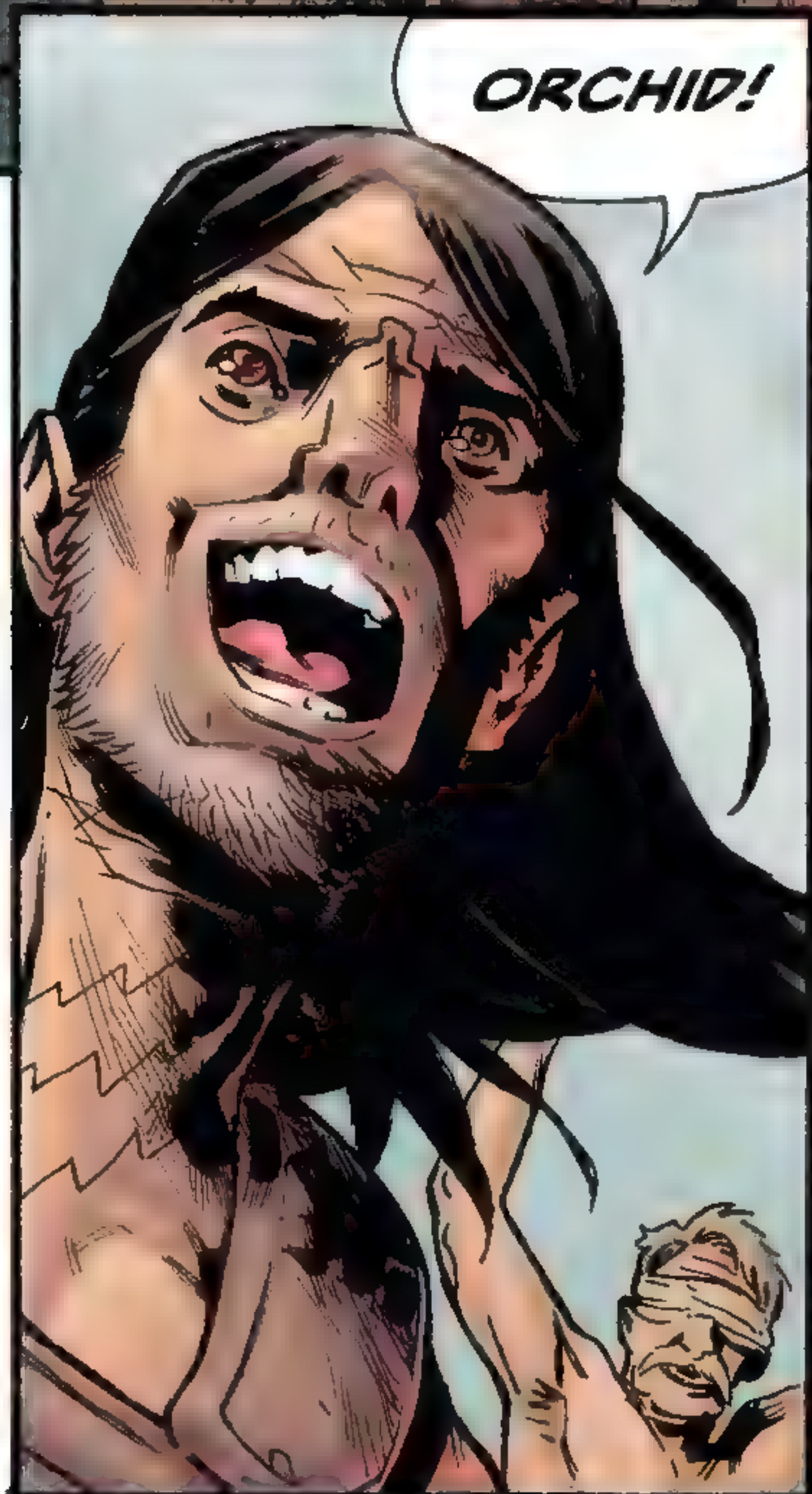




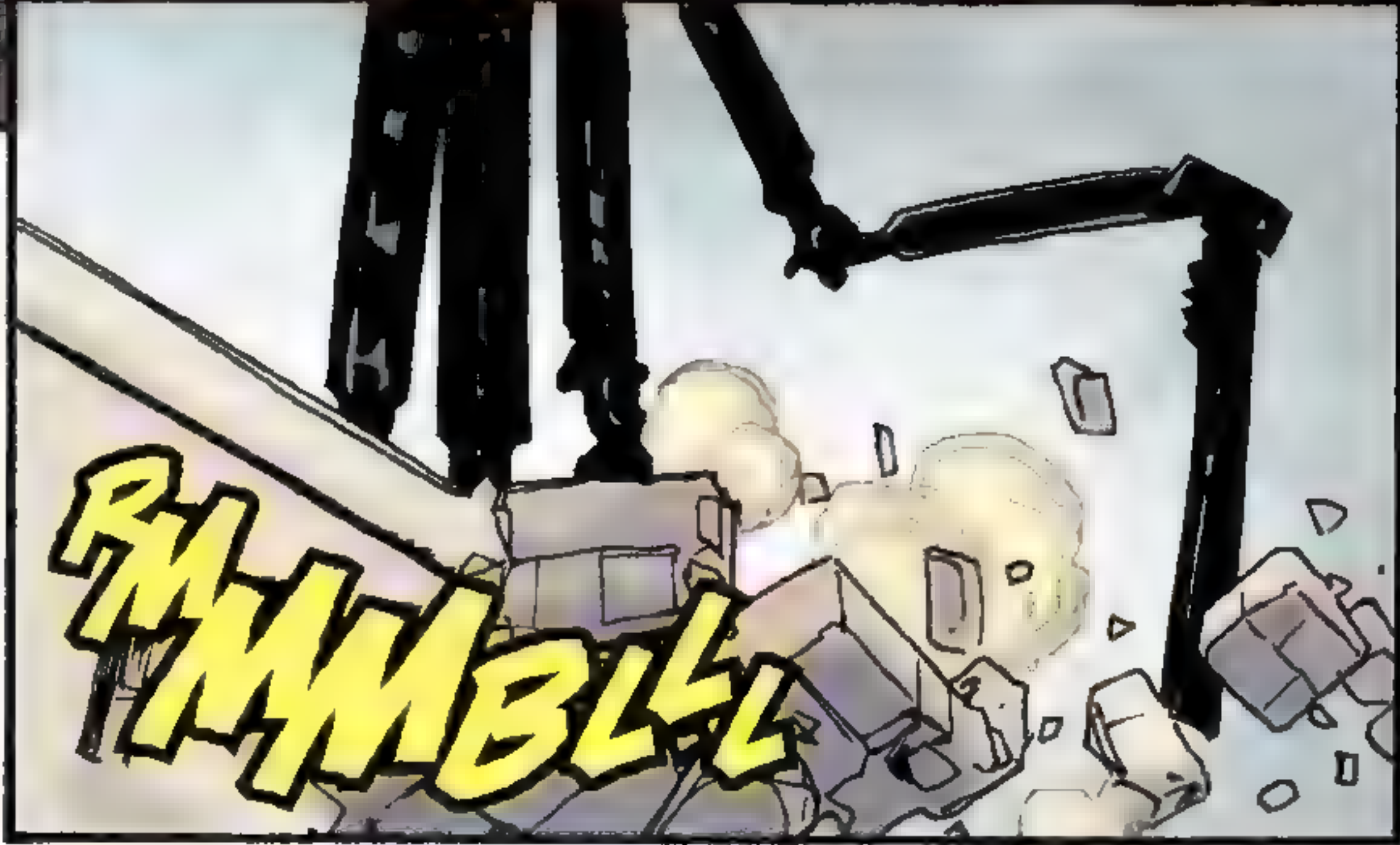
















LET'S  
BRING THIS  
MATTER TO A  
CONCLUSION,  
SHALL WE?

**SHOOOM**





SHOOOM  
SHOOOM  
SHOOOM

SHOOOM SHOOOM SHOOOM

YES.

LET'S.





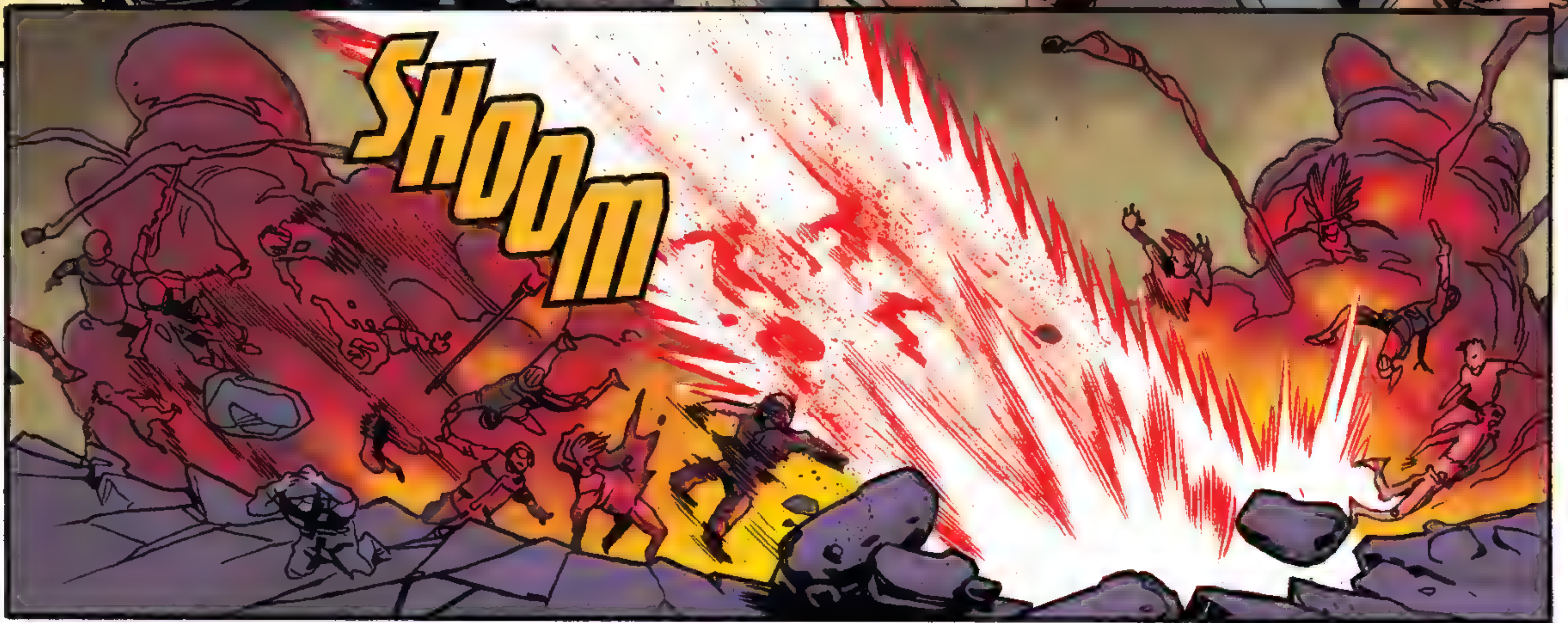




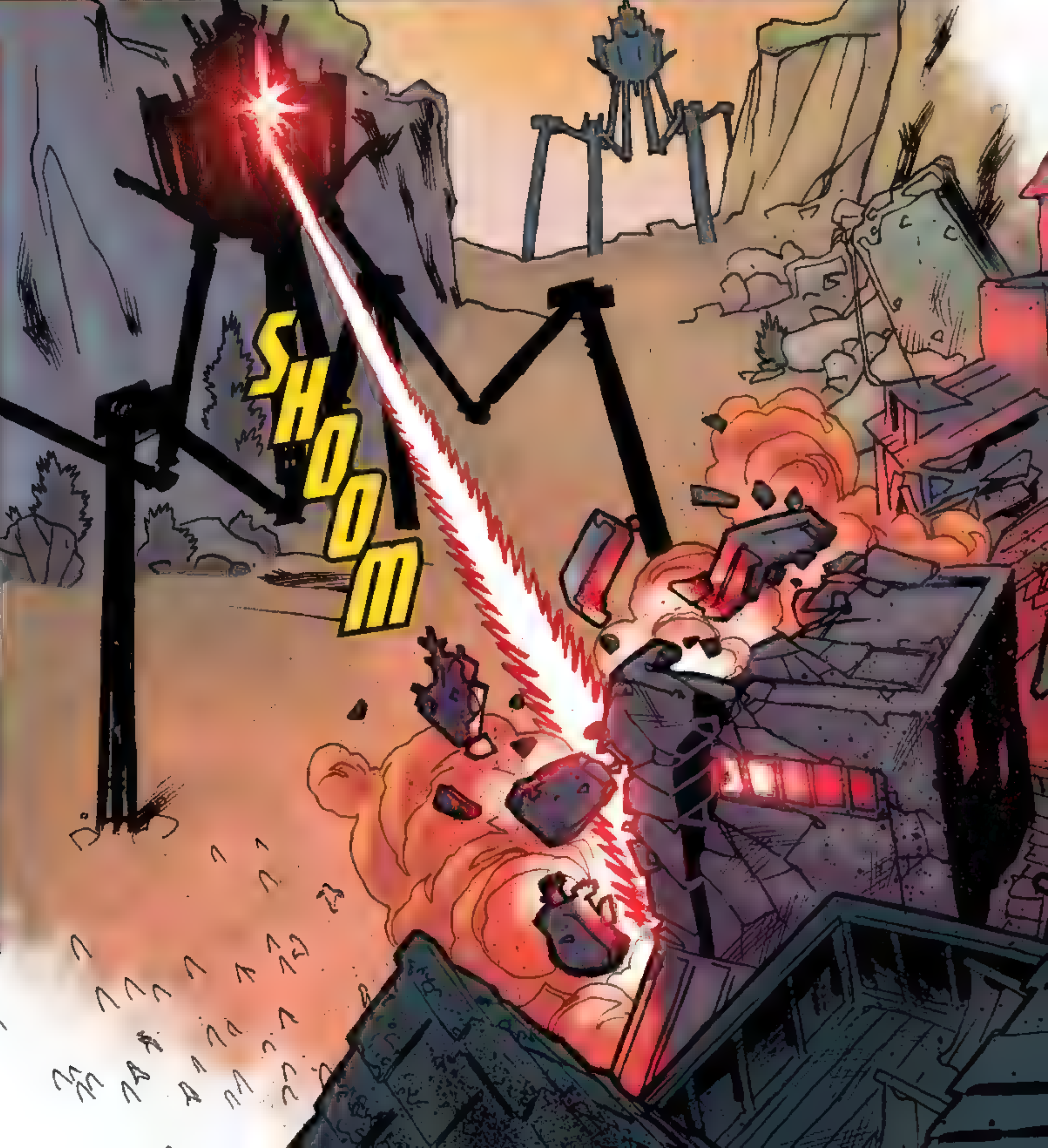
KNOW YOUR ROLE

*Handwritten signature or mark.*













A THOUSAND VOICES IN MY HEAD STEEL MY WILL.



A THOUSAND ARMS...



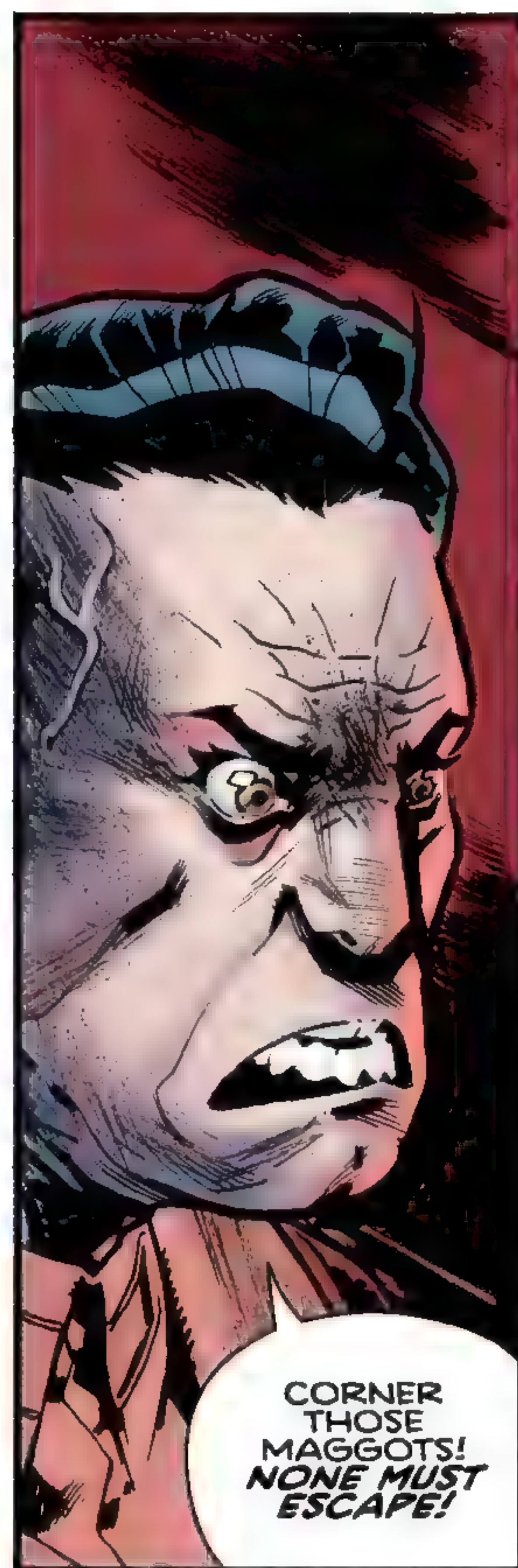
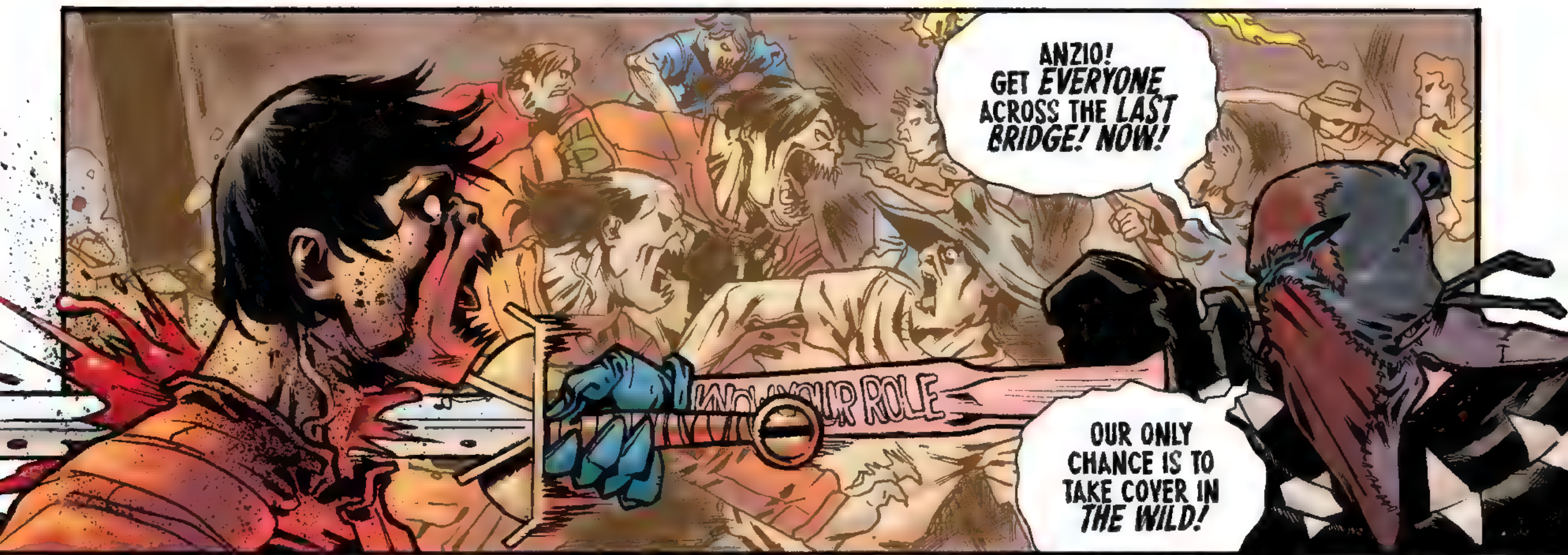
...SWING MY SWORD.



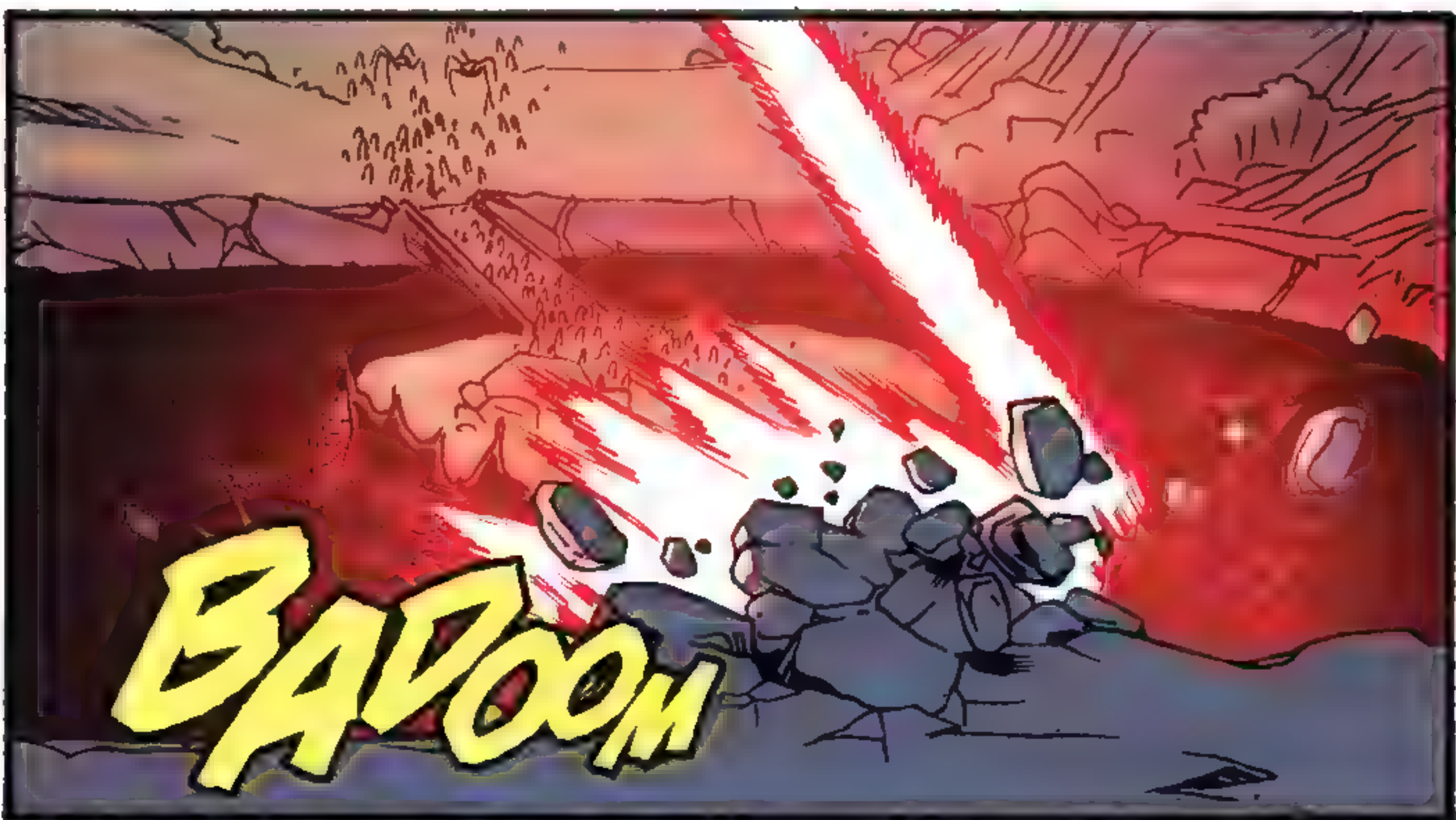
HEEN-HEEN-NEH-NEH-NEH

BUT THERE ARE JUST TOO MANY OF THEM.

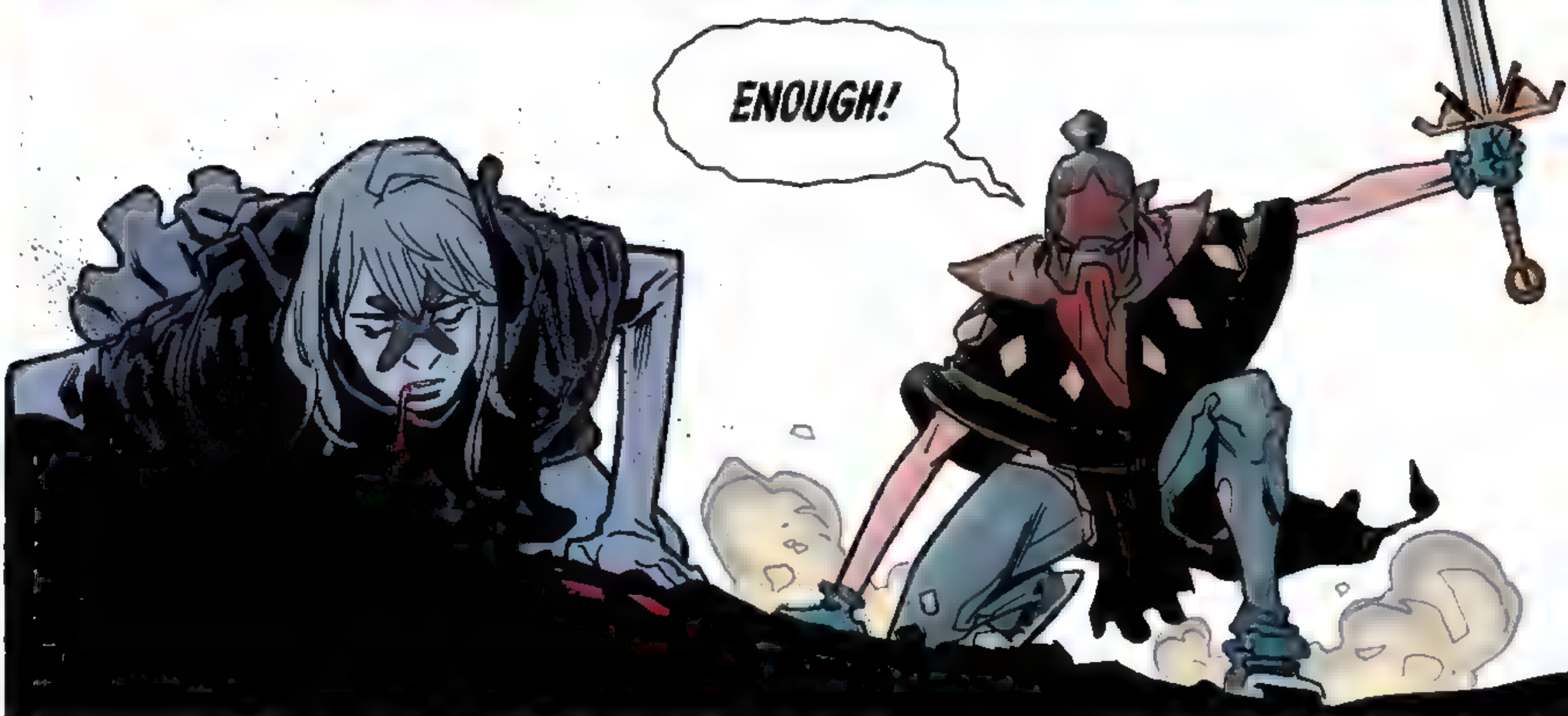
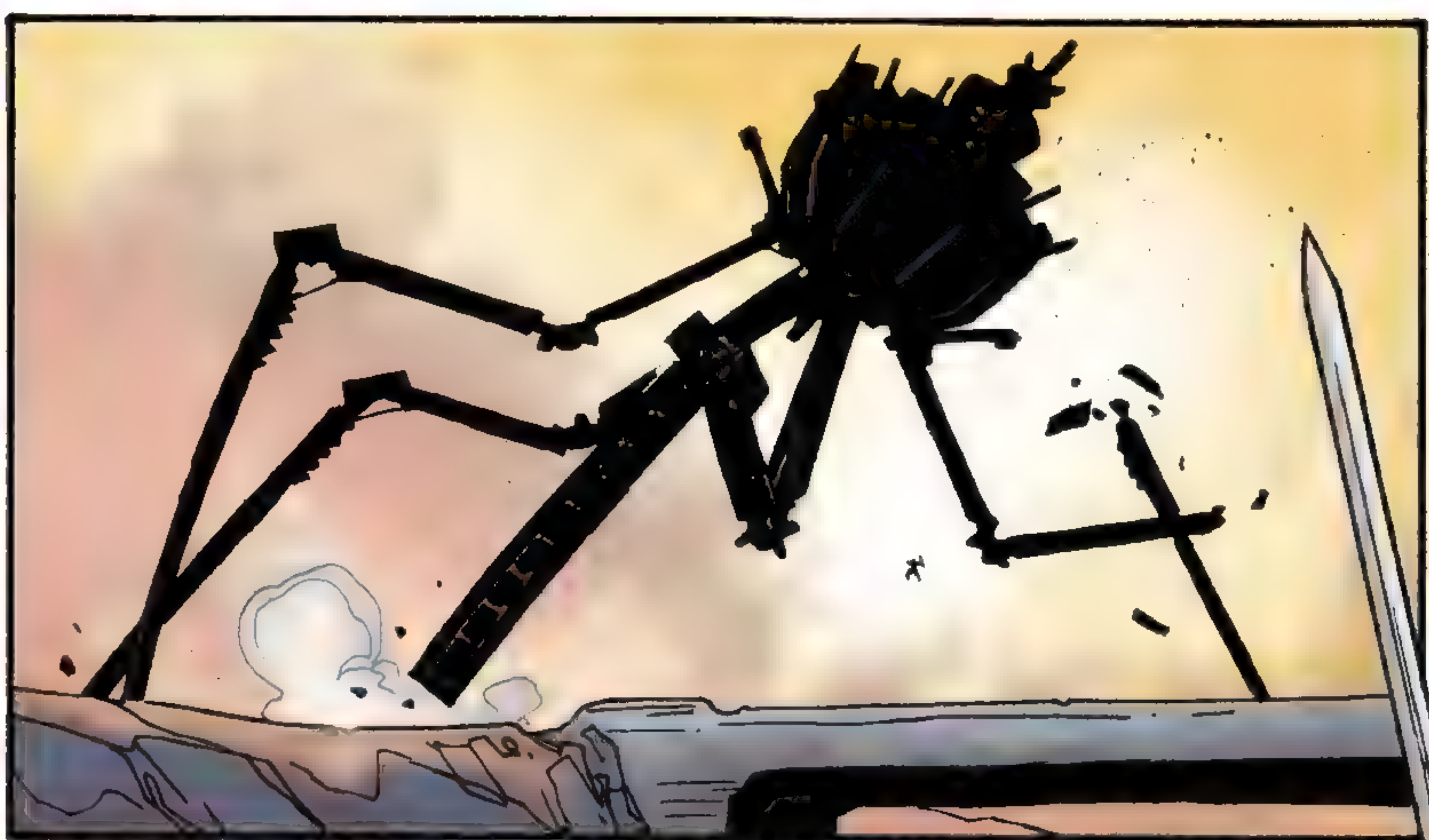
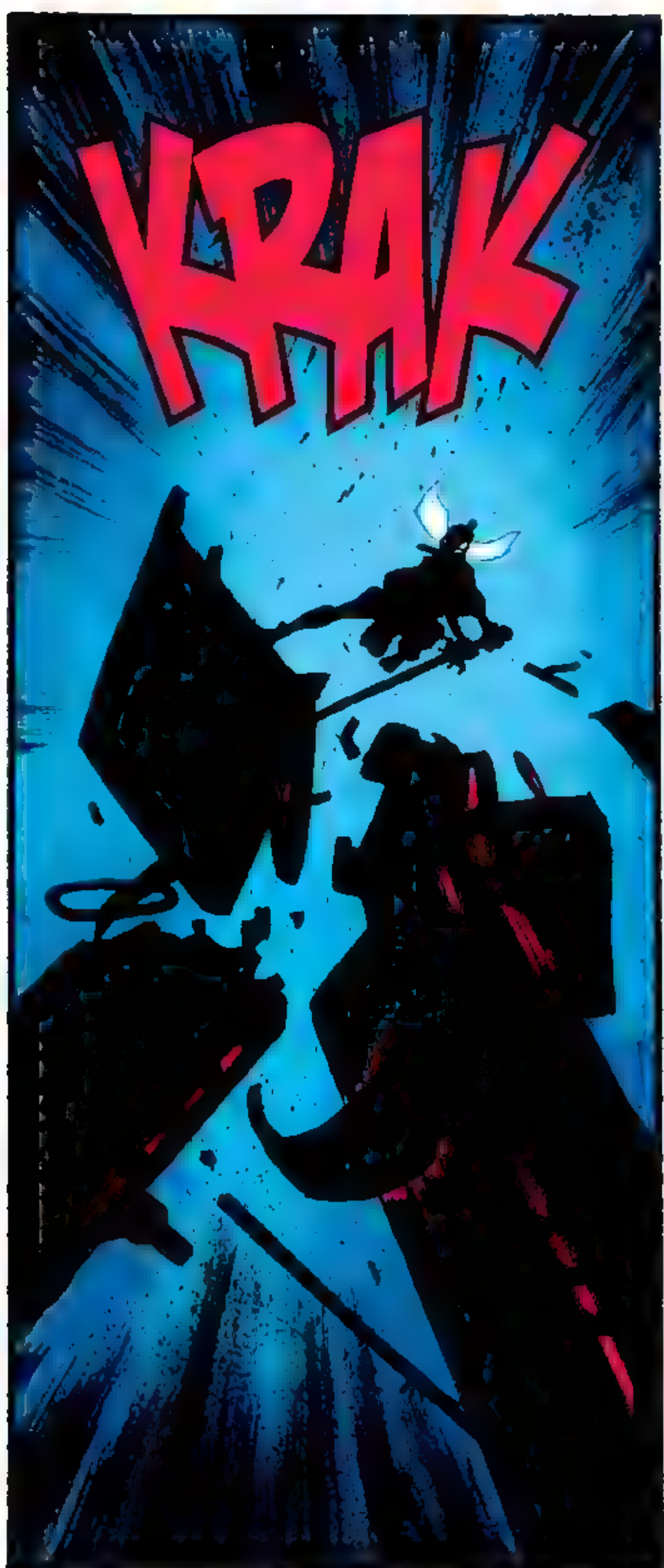
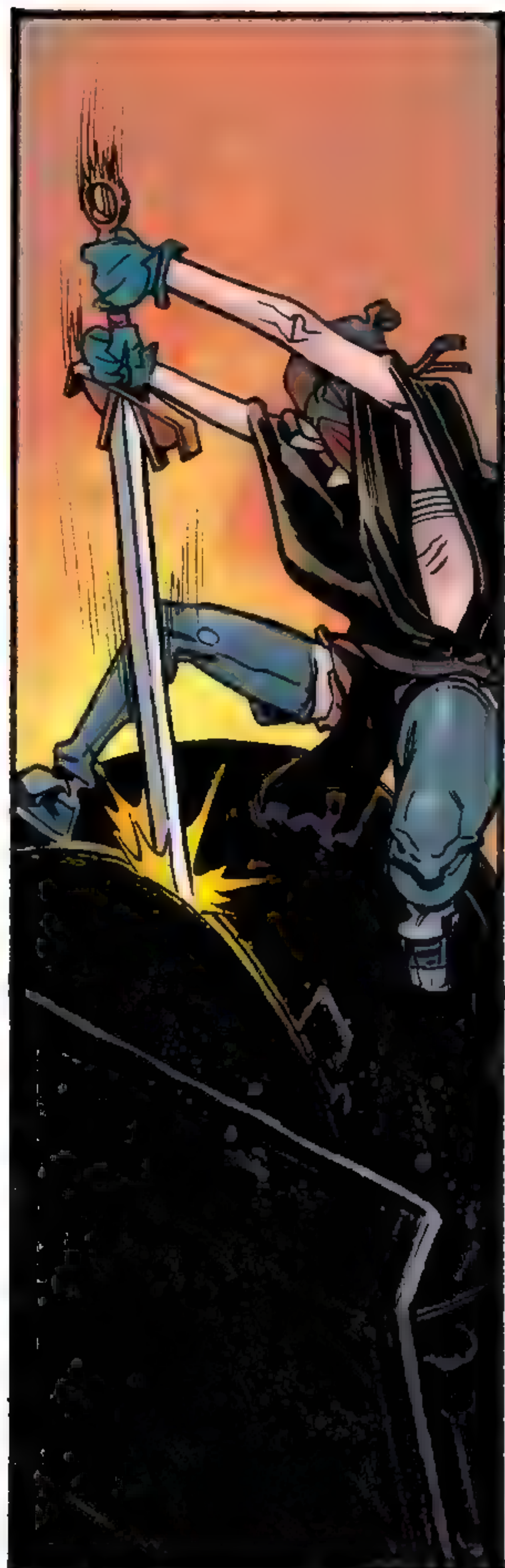
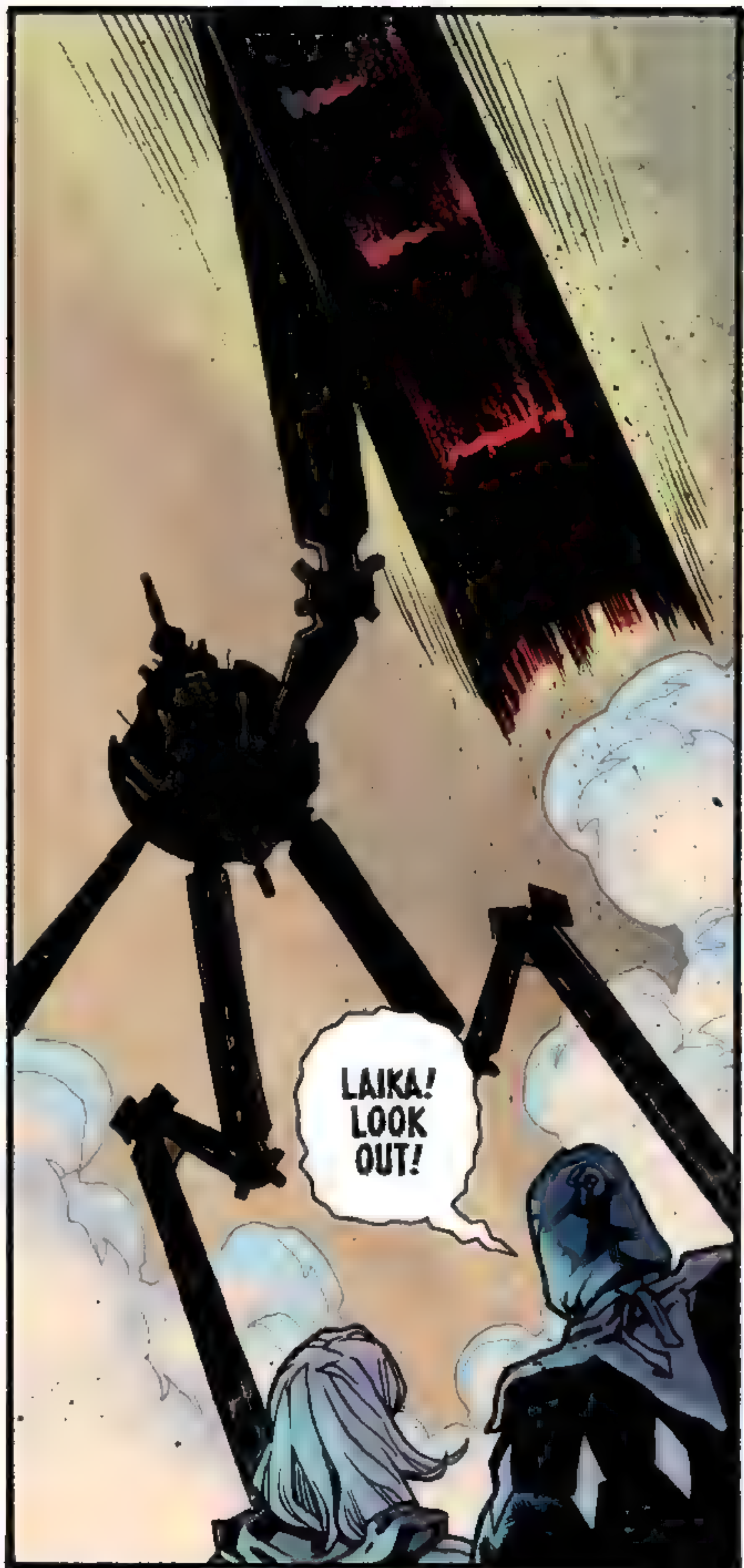




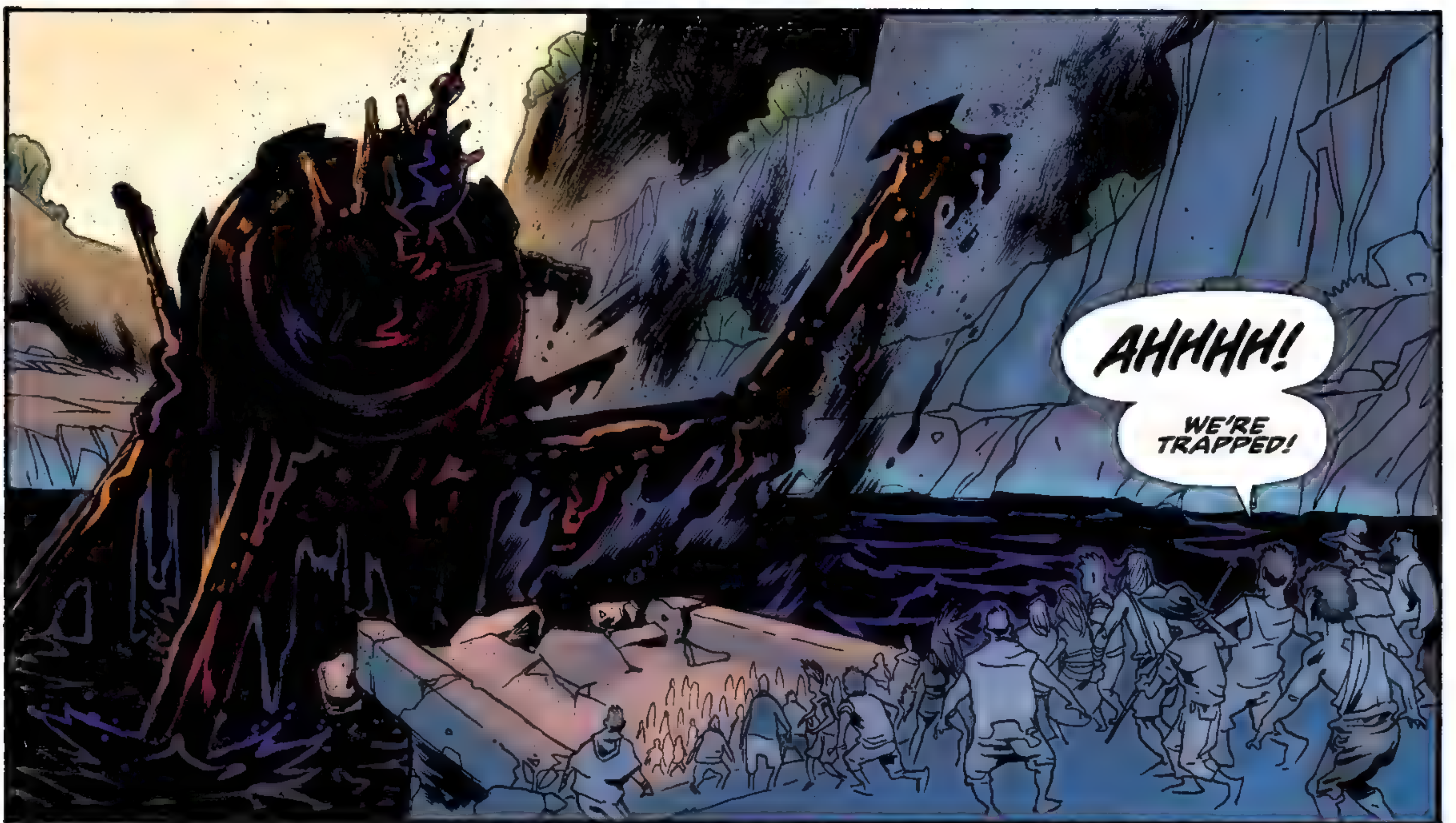
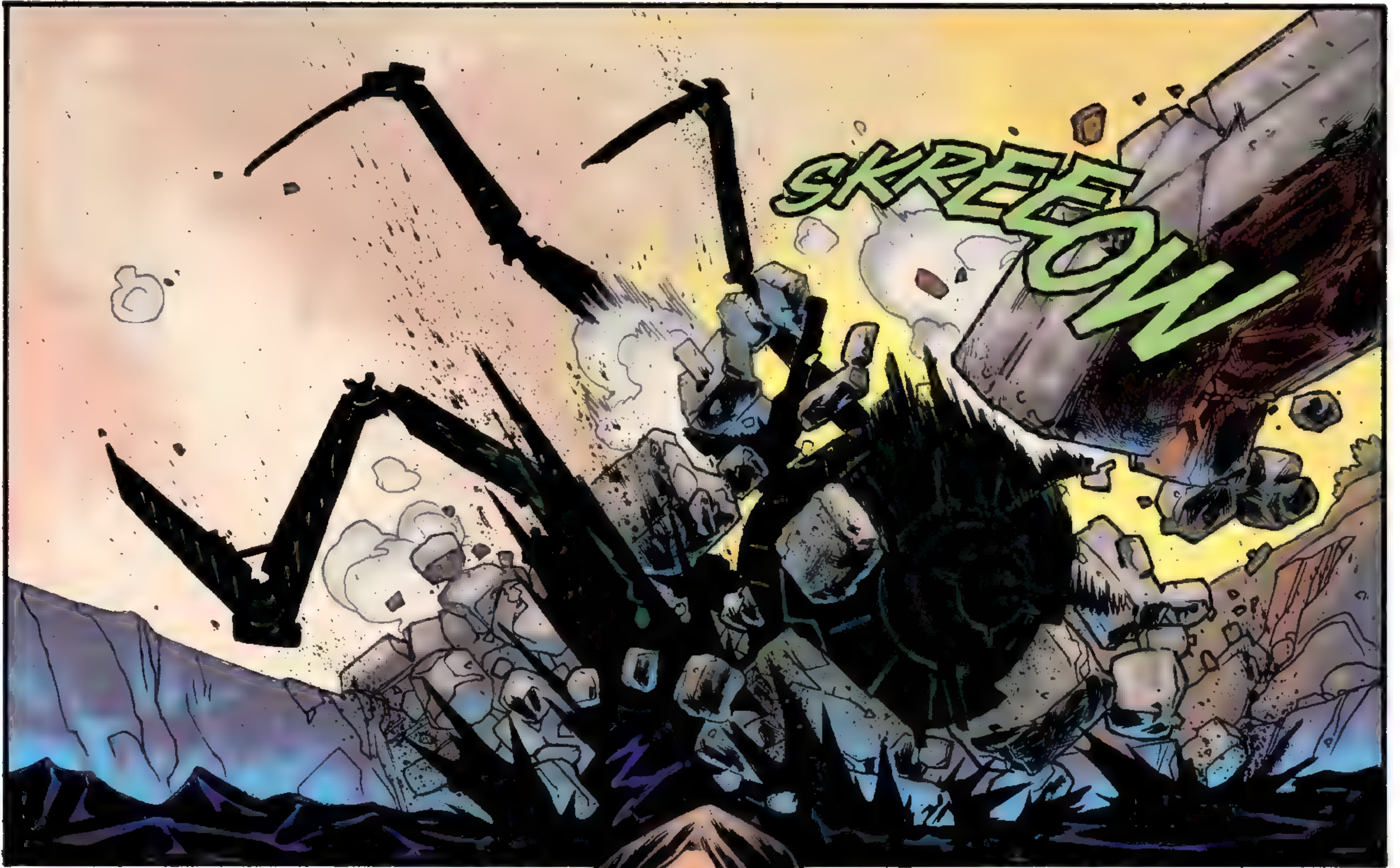




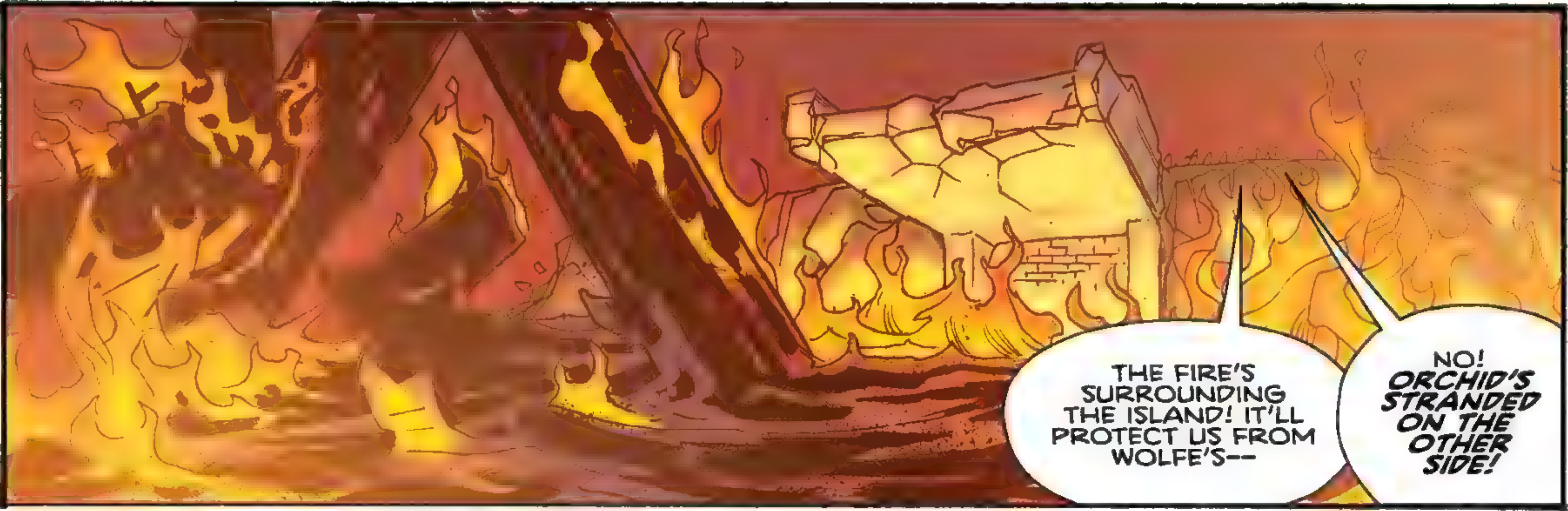
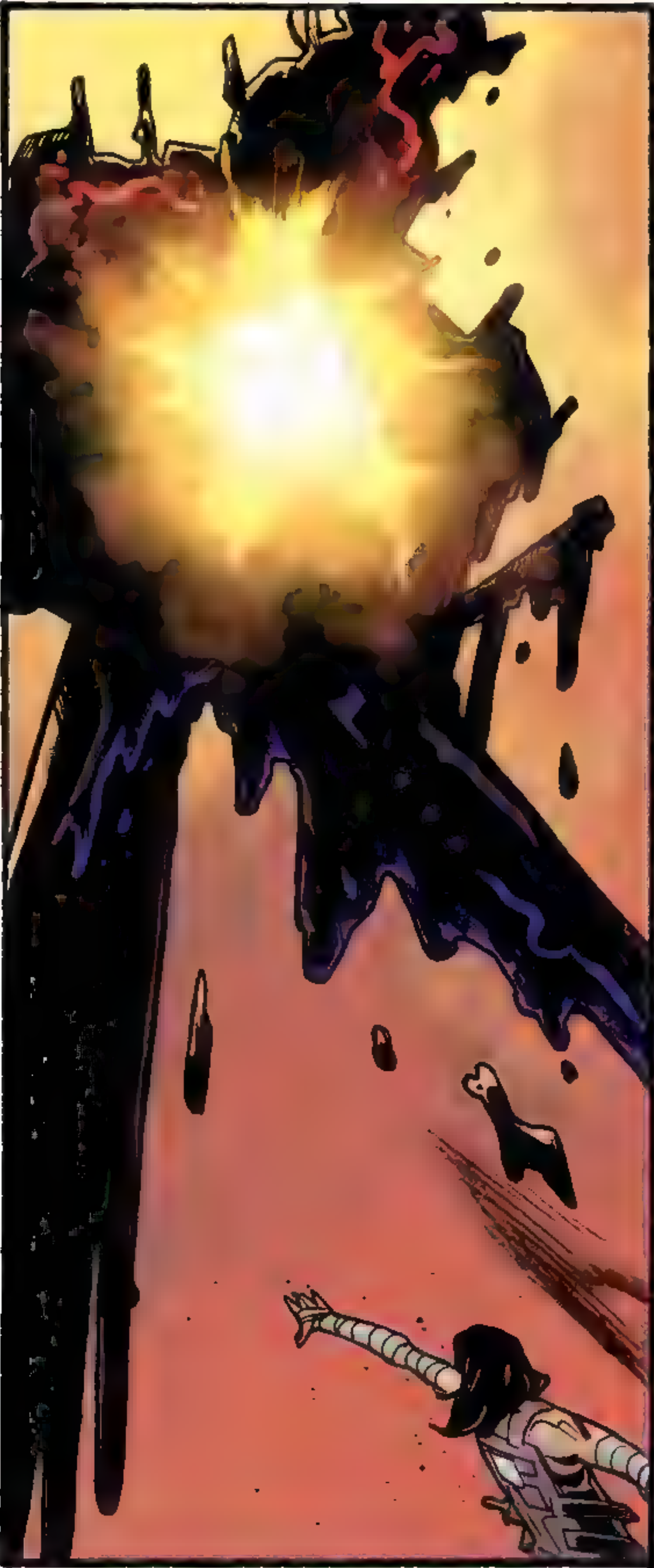
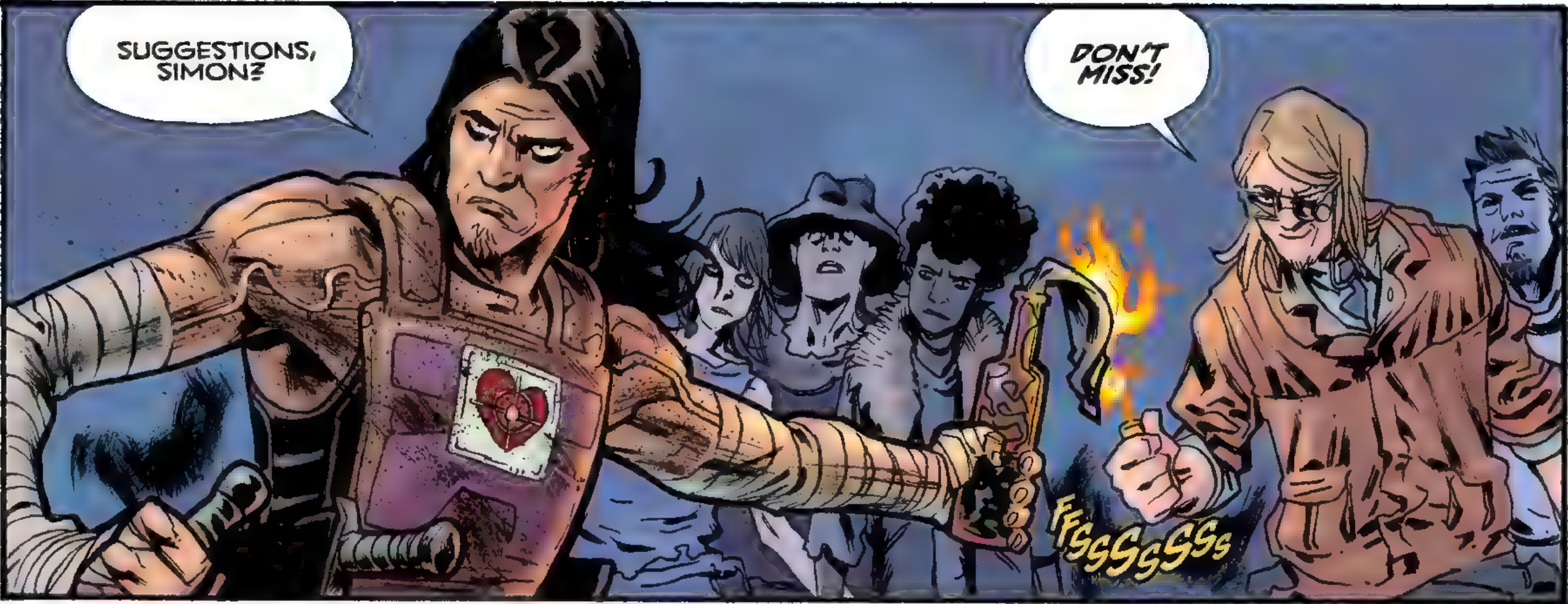




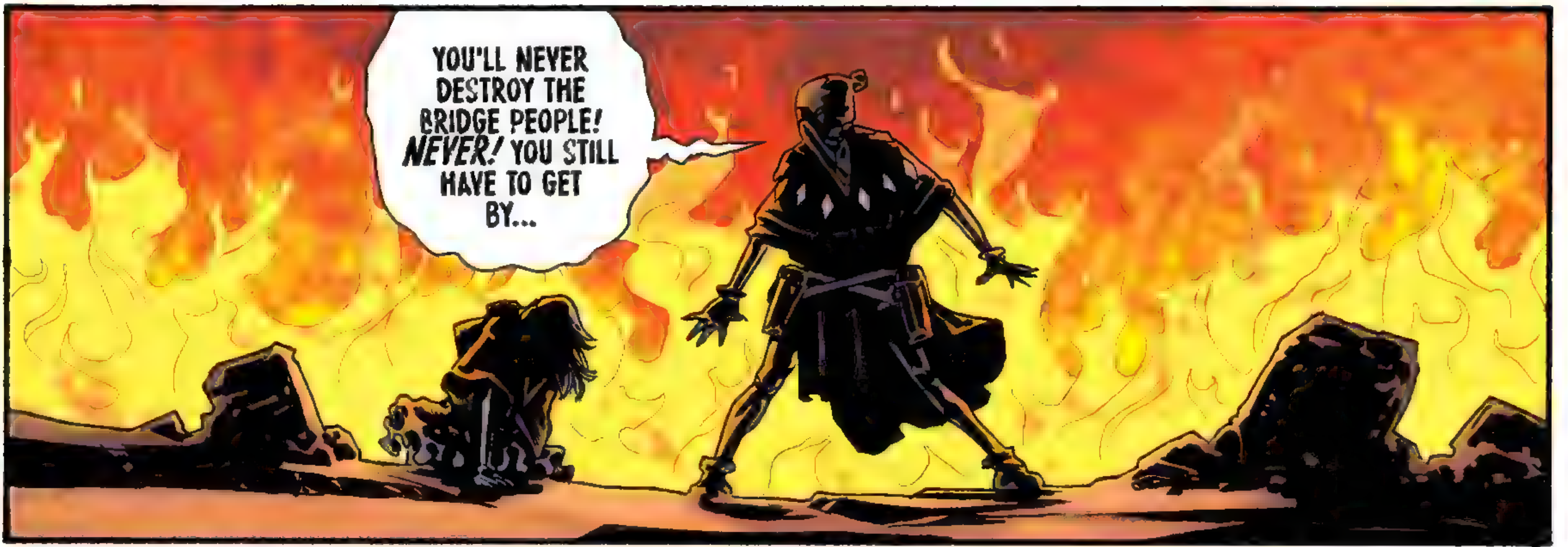




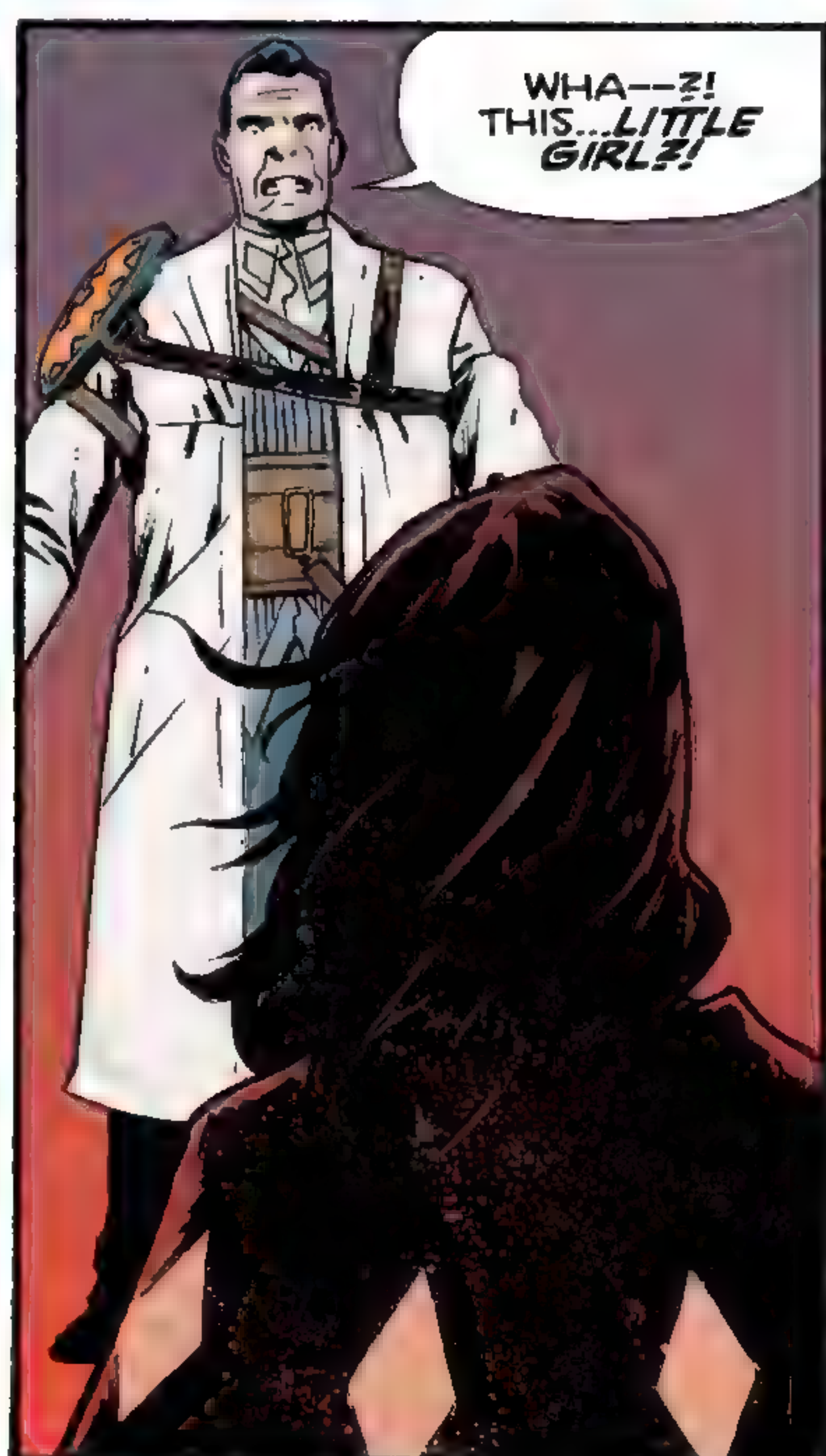
















A man with a large, glowing orange and blue gear on his chest. He has a serious, almost angry expression. He is wearing a white shirt and a dark jacket.

NEVER  
MIND. I AM  
MAKING YOU  
AN *OFFER*.

I AM WILLING  
TO CALL AN *END*  
TO THESE SENSELESS  
HOSTILITIES. I WILL  
SPARE THE LIVES OF  
EVERY MAN, WOMAN,  
AND CHILD ON THE  
BATTLEFIELD. I'LL EVEN  
SPARE *YOUR* LIFE--BUT  
YOU MUST DO ONE  
SMALL THING.

THE  
MASK IS  
FATAL IF  
WORN BY  
ANOTHER.  
SO...

DO TELL  
ME...IS THAT  
POOR SOUL OF  
PARTICULAR  
IMPORTANCE  
TO YOU?

Two women are shown in a fiery, orange and yellow background. One woman is on the left, looking down with a sad expression. The other woman is on the right, looking up with a determined expression.

GOOD, I SEE  
SHE IS. PUT THE  
MASK ON *HER*.  
NOW.

PUT HER  
OUT OF HER MISERY--  
NO ONE WILL KNOW. YOU  
CAN SAVE ALL THE OTHERS.  
AND...*YOU CAN SAVE  
YOURSELF*

DO THAT  
ONE THING...AND  
YOU CAN ALL  
GO *FREE*.

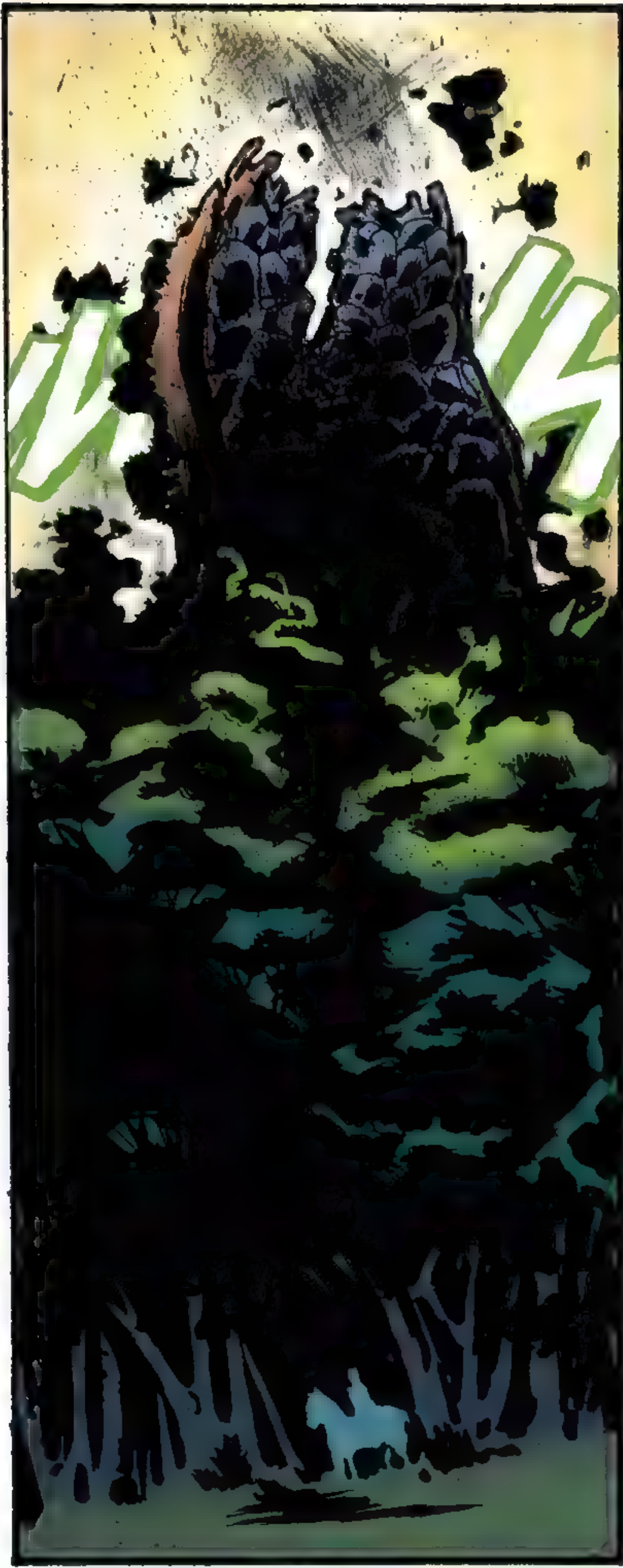
A woman with long dark hair is holding a large, dark, and somewhat grotesque mask. She has a determined expression.

IT'S  
JUST...ONE...  
INNOCENT...  
GIRL.

NEVER! IT'S BETTER  
TO CONQUER *YOURSELF*  
THAN WIN A *THOUSAND*  
BATTLES. *THAT* VICTORY  
IS *MINE*--

YOU WANT  
THIS ACCURSED  
MASK?! THEN  
*TAKE IT!* AND  
DO WITH US AS  
YOU WILL!

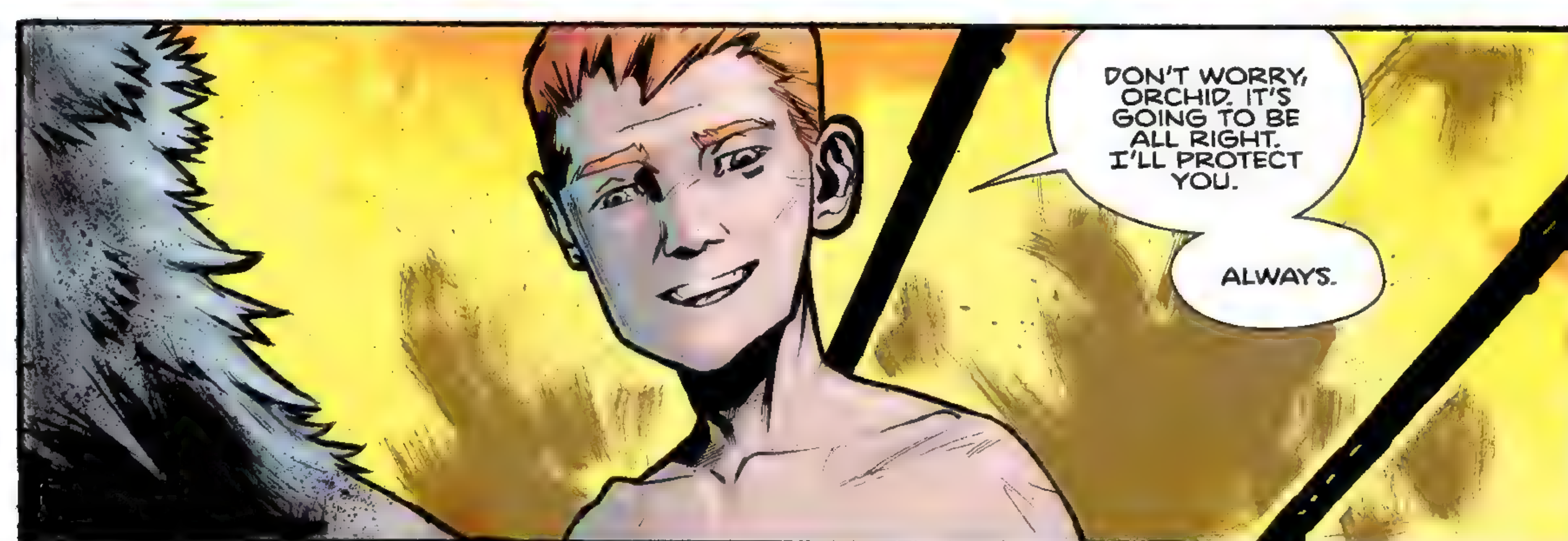
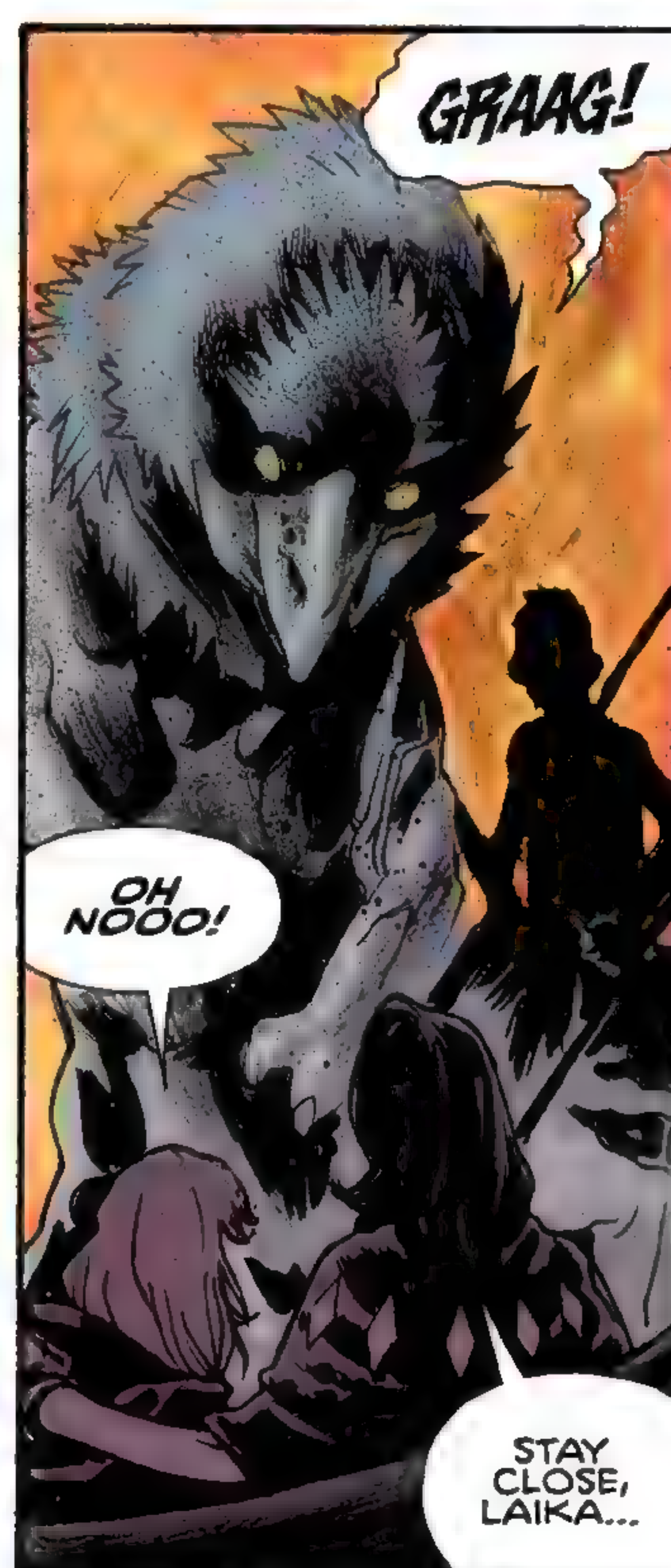
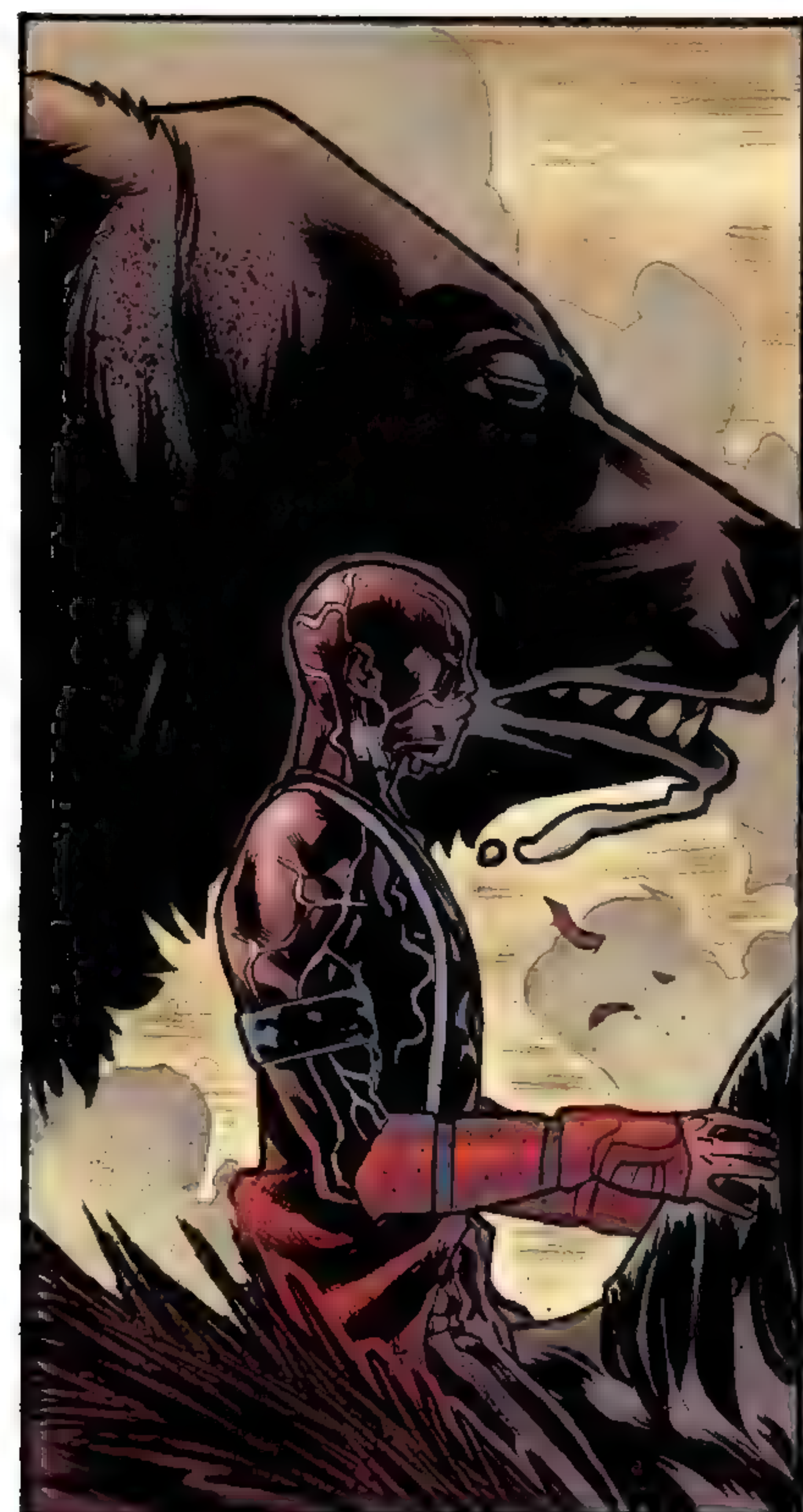




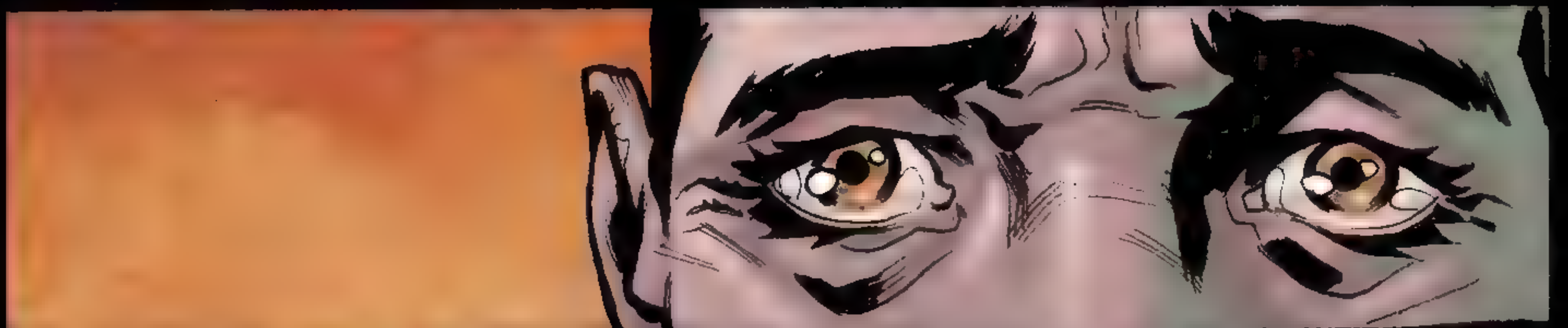
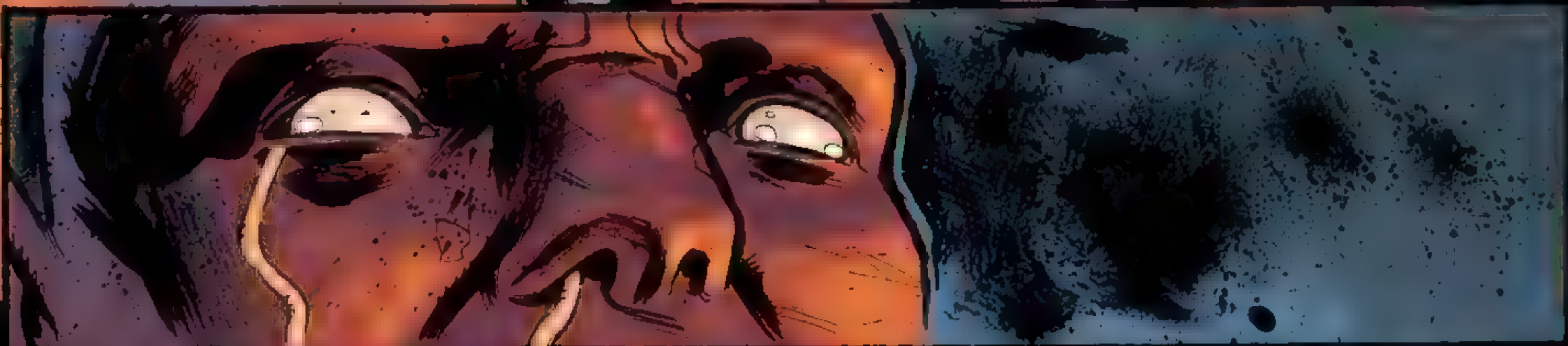




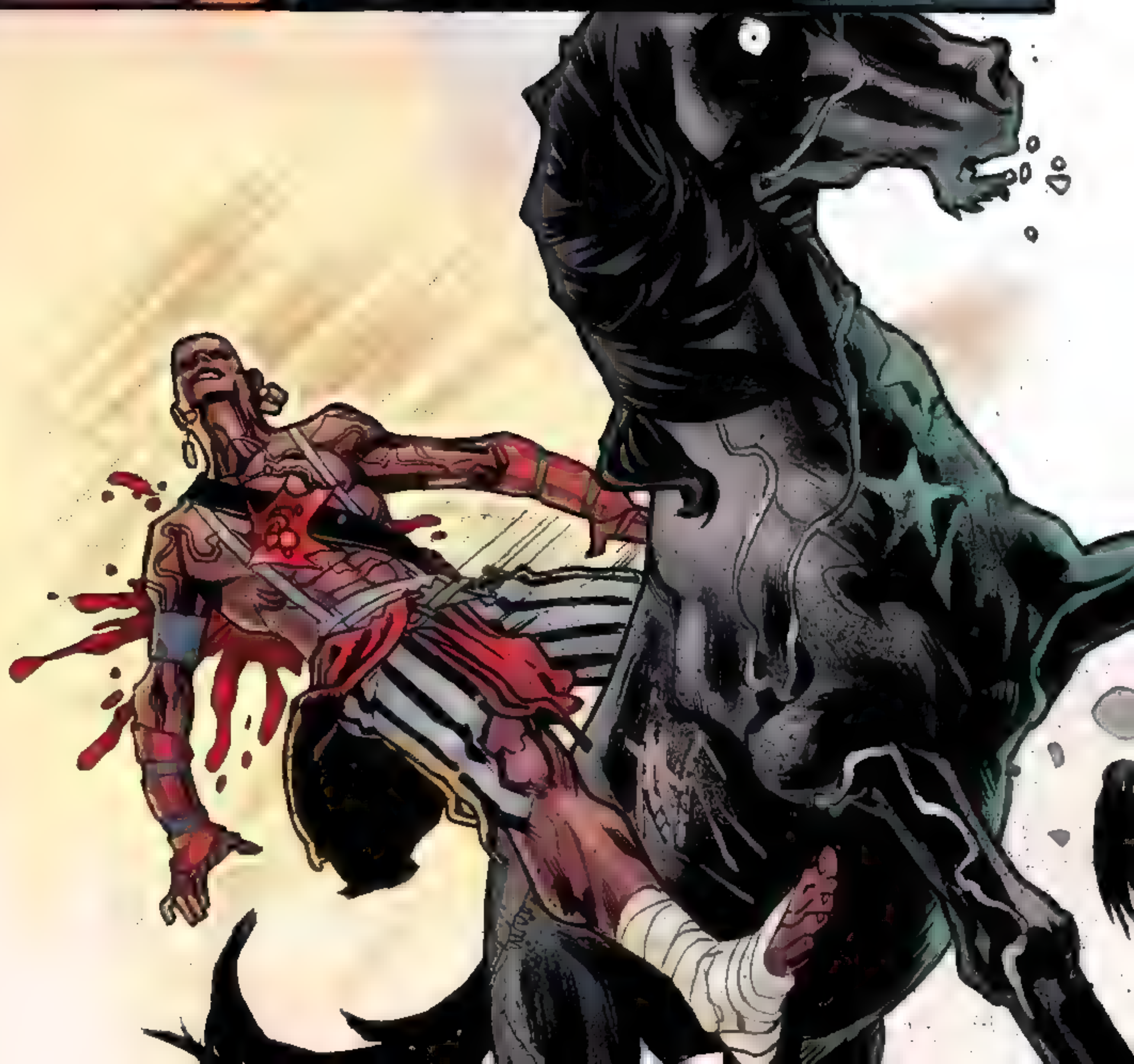














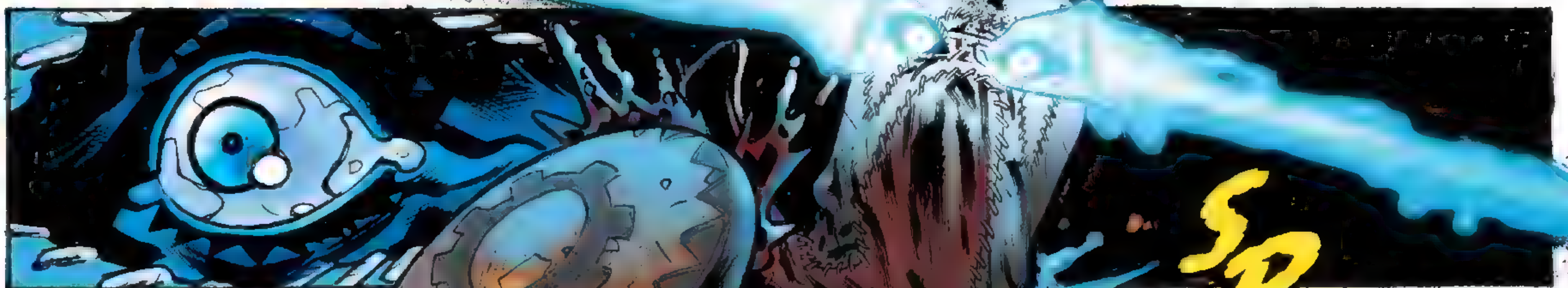


HAH!  
WITH BARRABAS  
DEAD, THESE FOUL  
CREATURES WILL  
DISPERSE AND WE'LL  
MOP UP THESE  
BRIDGE LICE--

I OWN  
EVERYTHING,  
AND I INTEND  
TO KEEP  
IT--



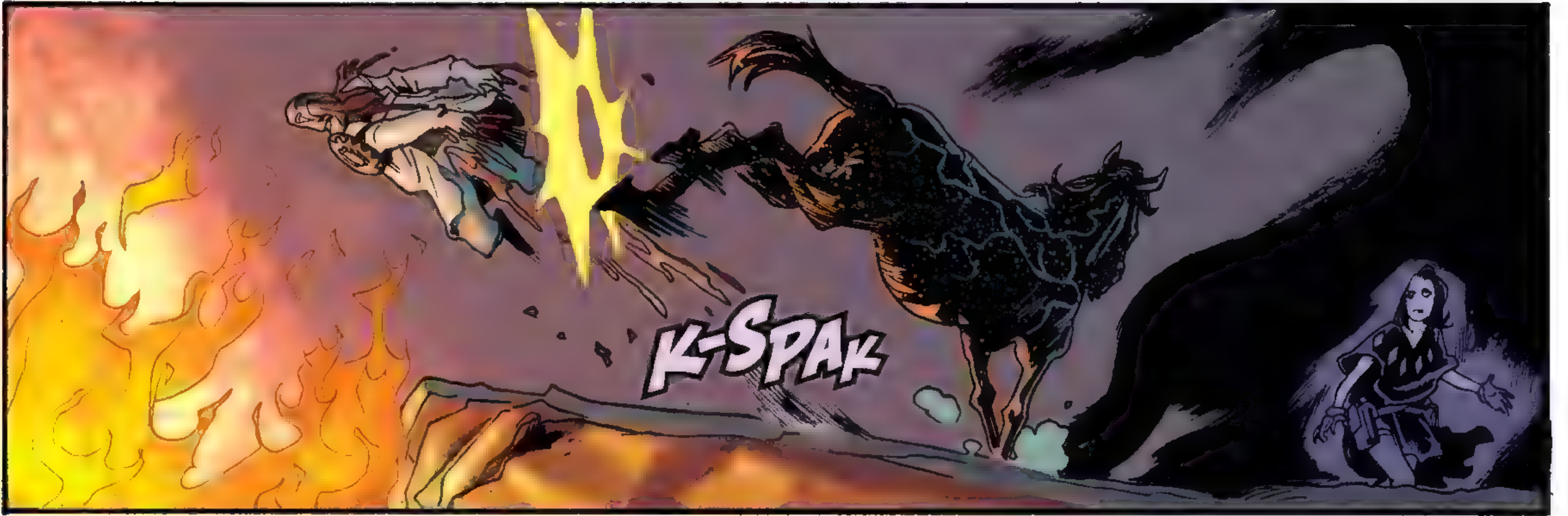
YOU DON'T OWN  
ME! AND YOU  
DON'T OWN  
US!



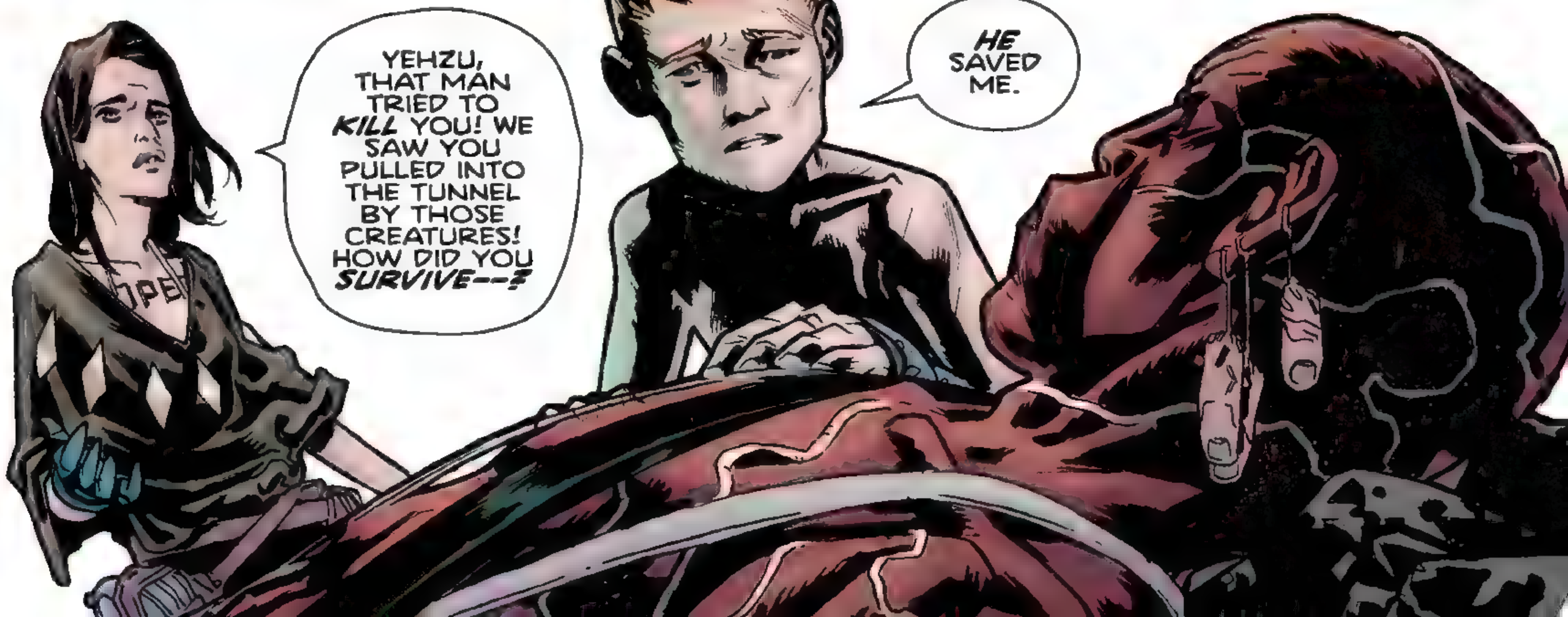
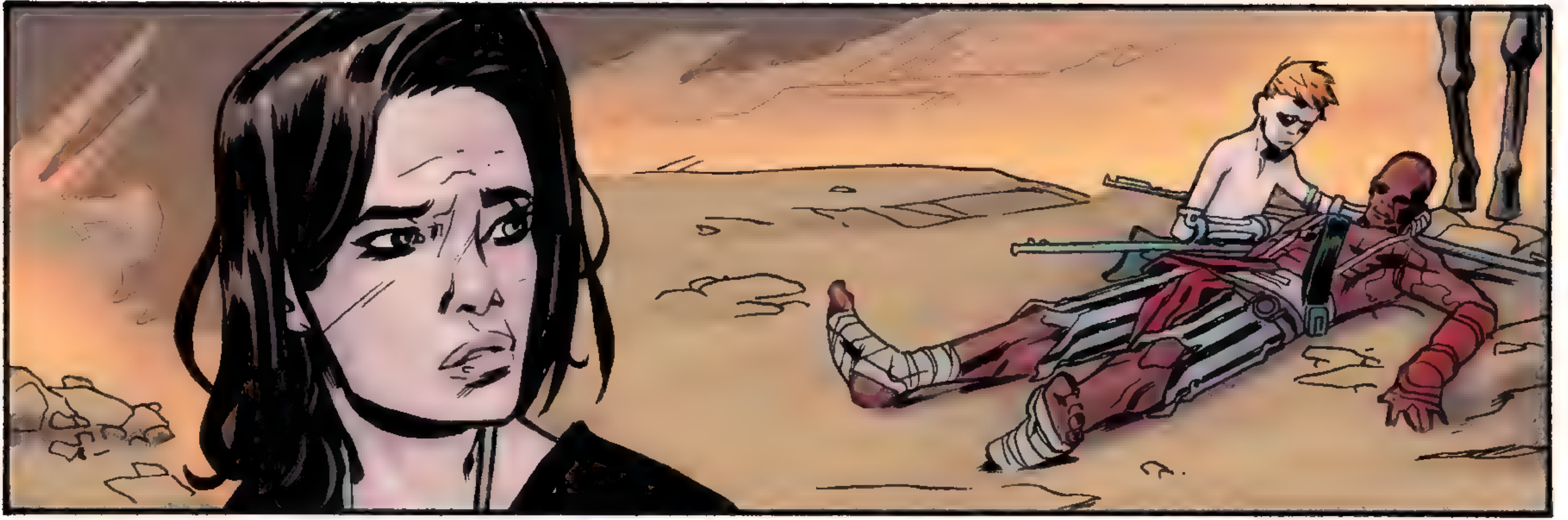
SPLOOSH



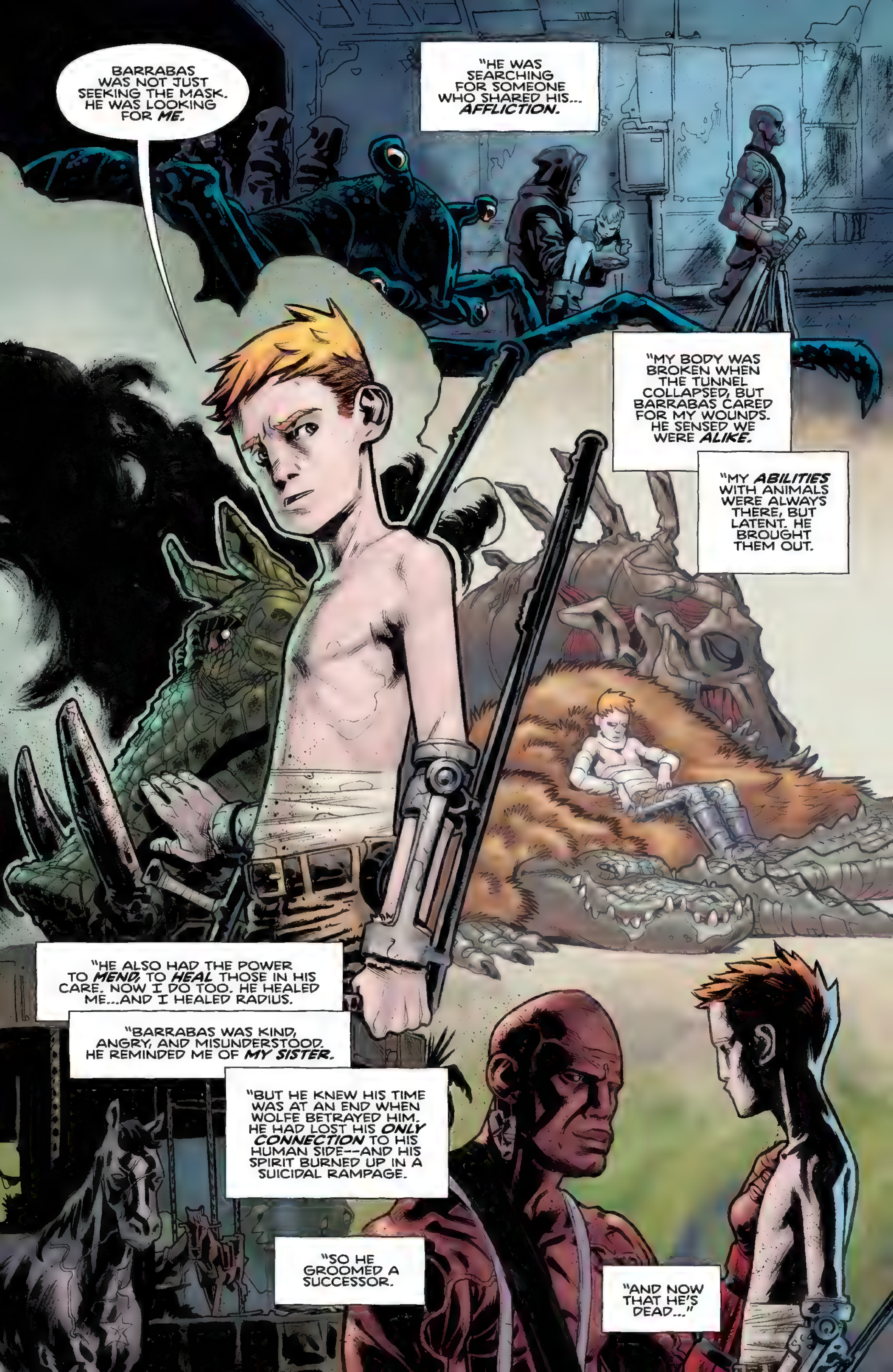












BARRABAS  
WAS NOT JUST  
SEEKING THE MASK.  
HE WAS LOOKING  
FOR *ME*.

"HE WAS  
SEARCHING  
FOR SOMEONE  
WHO SHARED HIS...  
*AFFLICTION*."

"MY BODY WAS  
BROKEN WHEN  
THE TUNNEL  
COLLAPSED, BUT  
BARRABAS CARED  
FOR MY WOUNDS.  
HE SENSED WE  
WERE *ALIKE*."

"MY *ABILITIES*  
WITH ANIMALS  
WERE ALWAYS  
THERE, BUT  
LATENT. HE  
BROUGHT  
THEM OUT."

"HE ALSO HAD THE POWER  
TO *MEND*, TO *HEAL* THOSE IN HIS  
CARE. NOW I DO TOO. HE HEALED  
ME...AND I HEALED RADIUS."

"BARRABAS WAS KIND,  
ANGRY, AND MISUNDERSTOOD.  
HE REMINDED ME OF *MY SISTER*."

"BUT HE KNEW HIS TIME  
WAS AT AN END WHEN  
WOLFE BETRAYED HIM.  
HE HAD LOST HIS *ONLY*  
*CONNECTION* TO HIS  
HUMAN SIDE--AND HIS  
SPIRIT BURNED UP IN A  
SUICIDAL RAMPAGE."

"SO HE  
GROOMED A  
SUCCESSOR."

"AND NOW  
THAT HE'S  
DEAD..."





I AM  
THE LORD OF  
THE WILD.

THESE  
CREATURES  
WON'T HURT YOU  
NOW. THEY'RE AS  
FIERCE, OR AS GENTLE,  
AS THE HAND THAT  
GUIDES THEM.  
AND THEY'RE MY  
FRIENDS.

THEY'LL  
RETURN TO  
THEIR HOME...  
TO MY HOME...  
IN PEACE.

Oh,  
YEHZU! YOU  
CAN'T GO! IT'S  
A MIRACLE  
YOU'RE ALIVE.  
YOU **MUST** STAY  
WITH ME--

ORCHID, YOU  
KNOW I LOVE YOU.  
BUT MY PLACE NOW IS IN  
**THE WILD**, WHERE THERE  
IS MUCH WORK TO DO.  
YOUR PLACE IS  
**HERE**.

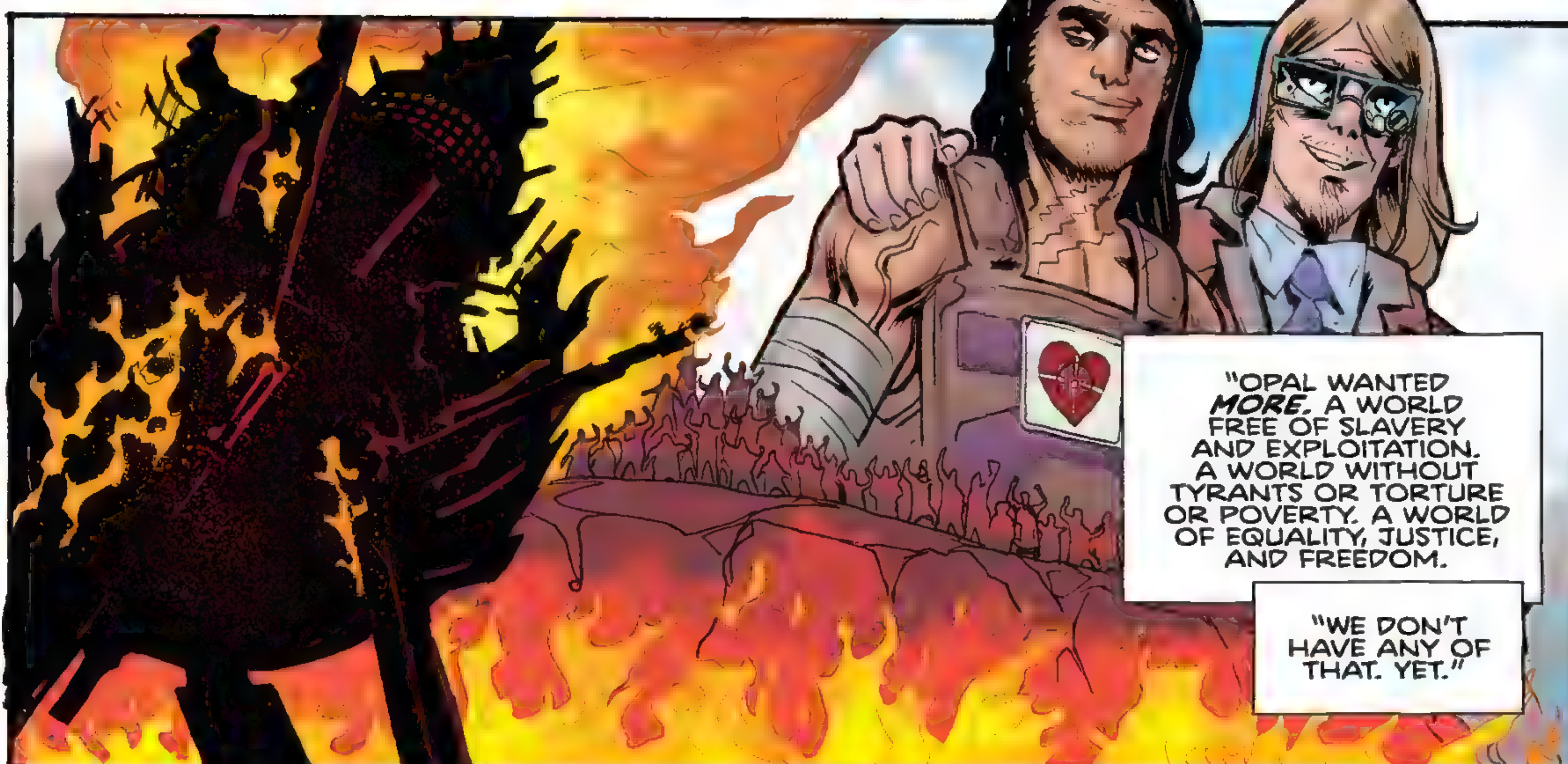


SO  
GOODBYE,  
DEAR SISTER.  
I'LL ALWAYS  
CARRY WITH  
ME THE  
LESSON OF  
YOUR BRAVERY  
AND YOUR  
LOVE.

BE  
REALISTIC--  
SEEK THE  
IMPOSSIBLE.



MAYBE EVERYTHING I WANTED  
**WAS** IMPOSSIBLE, LAIKA. I  
DREAMED OF A **HOME** AND  
SOME **PEACE**. AND HERE  
WE ARE IN THE MIDDLE  
OF A BLOODY  
BATTLEFIELD.



"OPAL WANTED  
**MORE**. A WORLD  
FREE OF SLAVERY  
AND EXPLOITATION.  
A WORLD WITHOUT  
TYRANTS OR TORTURE  
OR POVERTY. A WORLD  
OF EQUALITY, JUSTICE,  
AND FREEDOM.

"WE DON'T  
HAVE ANY OF  
THAT. YET."



BUT  
NOW IT'S **YEAR  
ZERO**. WE HAVE  
A CHANCE TO  
DO THINGS  
DIFFERENTLY.

AND...  
WE HAVE  
EACH  
OTHER.



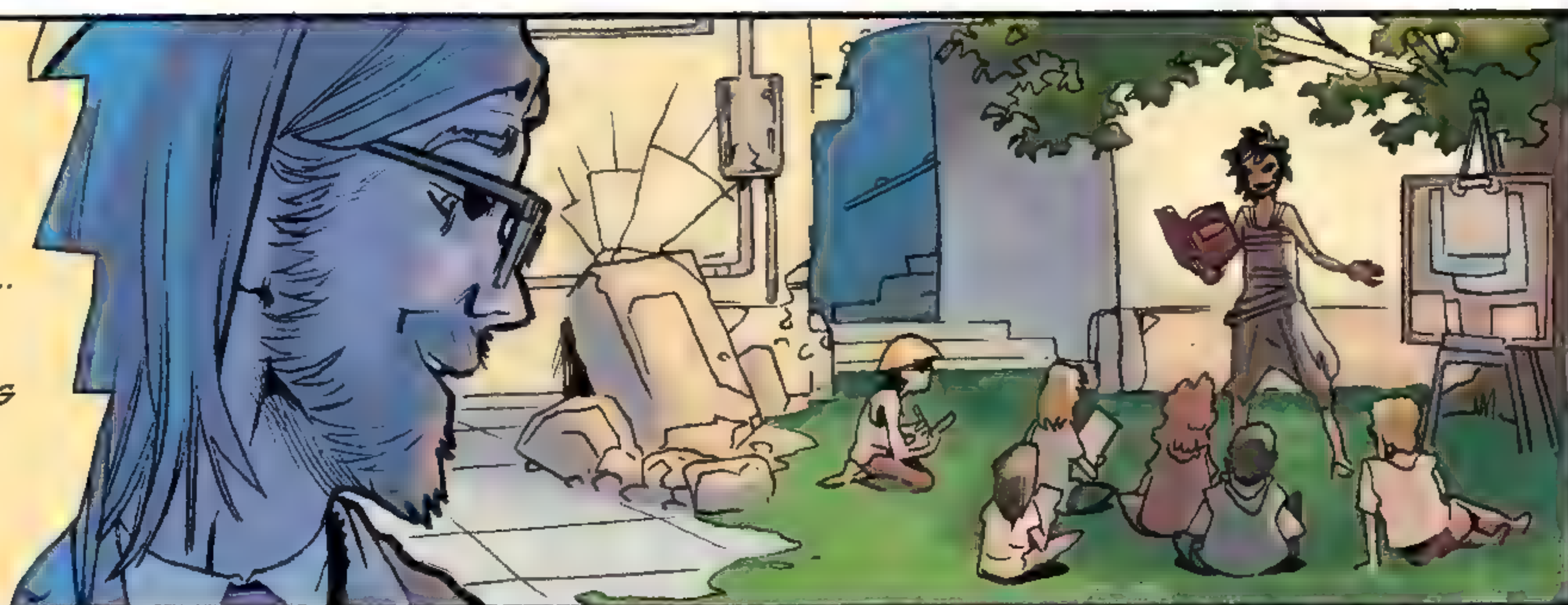
**ONE YEAR LATER.**

**RUINS OF FORTRESS PENUEL.**

Of course, many wanted to coronate Orchid the **QUEEN** of **NEW PENUEL**. Naturally, smart girl that she is, she'd have none of **THAT**. She insisted there'd be **NO LEADERS** at all. Can you imagine? And people have finally come around to the notion.



The **OPAL SCHOOL OF FREE THOUGHT** is thriving. People can **READ** once again. The youngsters are teaching themselves... and each other. I lent a hand early on, but as there were complaints about my incessant, directionless yammering, I have stepped aside.



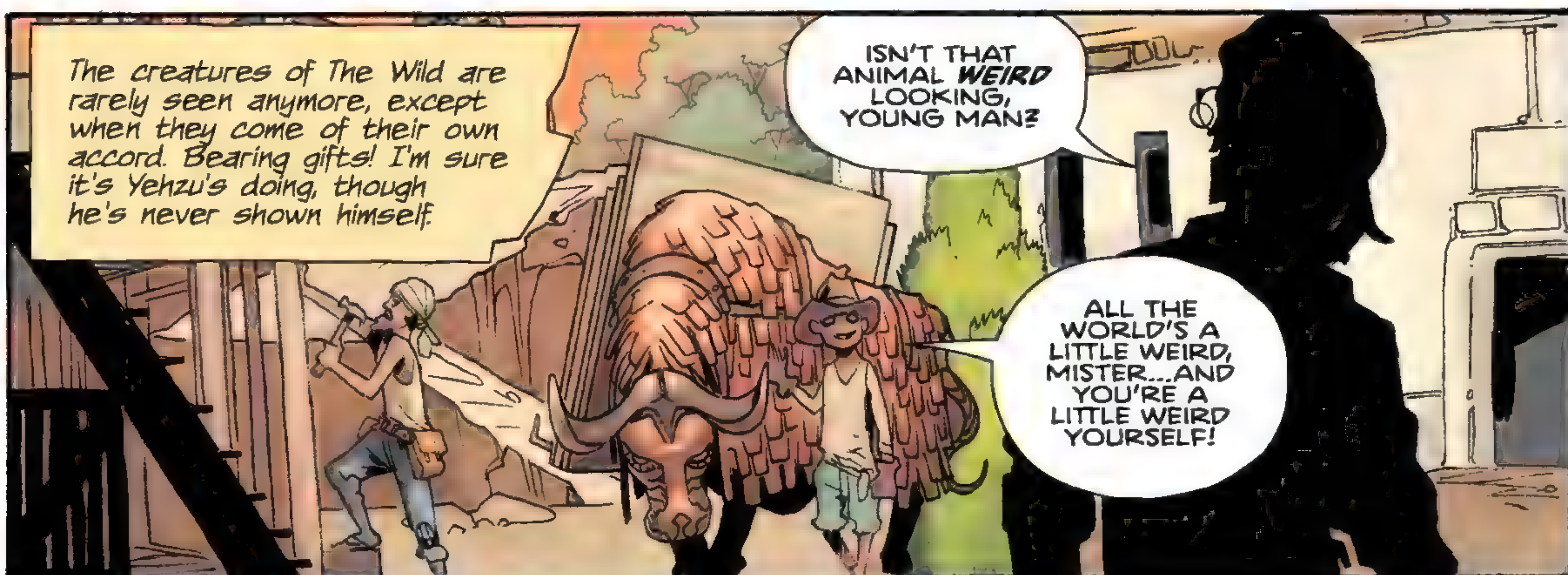
The **FREE CLINIC** combines the best of Bridge Folk Medicine with our new "book learning." And food, well, that's free now too. Clothes? Sure. Everybody pitches in as best they can.



The creatures of The Wild are rarely seen anymore, except when they come of their own accord. Bearing gifts! I'm sure it's Yehzu's doing, though he's never shown himself.

ISN'T THAT **ANIMAL WEIRD** LOOKING, **YOUNG MAN**?

ALL THE **WORLD'S A LITTLE WEIRD**, **MISTER...** AND **YOU'RE A LITTLE WEIRD YOURSELF!**







Now, don't get me wrong. It's not as if everyone always gets along. But when the difficult stuff comes up, we do our best to figure it out. Sometimes LOUDLY.



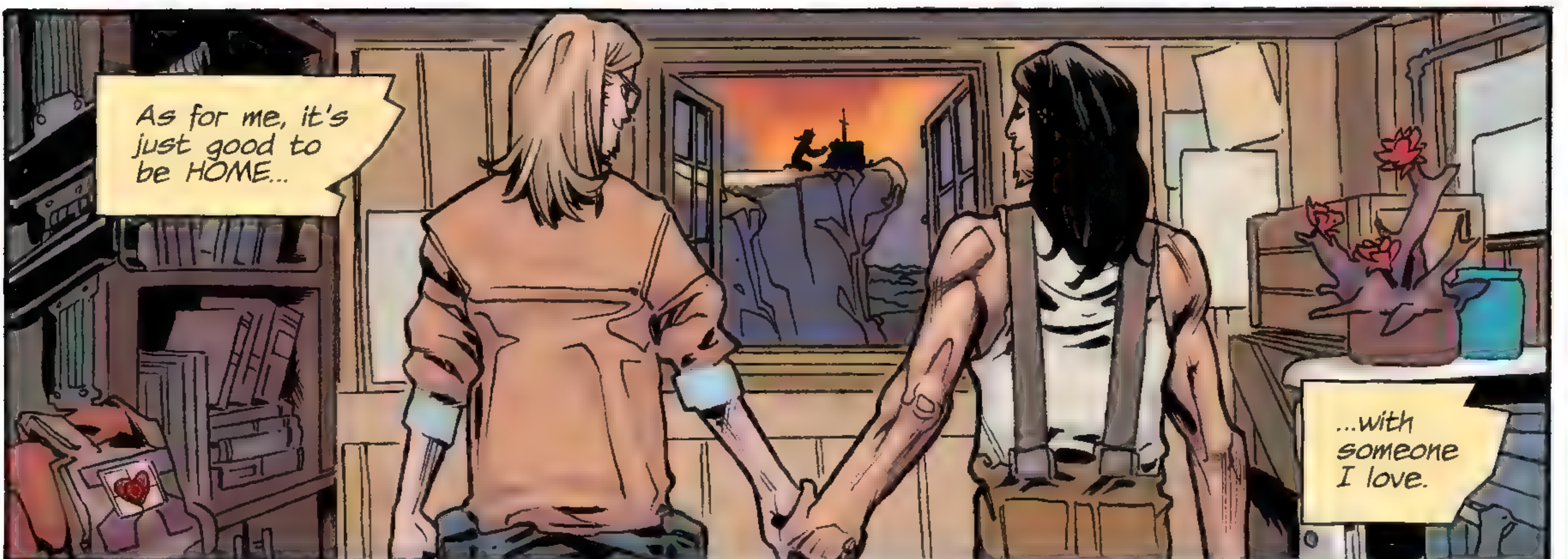
Hi,  
SIMON!

Dear Laika is expecting. Soon there will be a new generation who will grow up without the yoke of Tomo Wolfe and his bullies around their necks. We have a long way to go, but for them, by all appearances, it's already a better world.



Anzio, of course, never sees what's been done--only what REMAINS TO BE DONE. He works tirelessly for that just society he imagines. And who knows? Maybe one day...

But for him, what remains to be done TONIGHT is COOKING DINNER.



As for me, it's just good to be HOME...

...with someone I love.



As for Orchid, she just LIVES, quietly reclaiming the years the world stripped away from her.

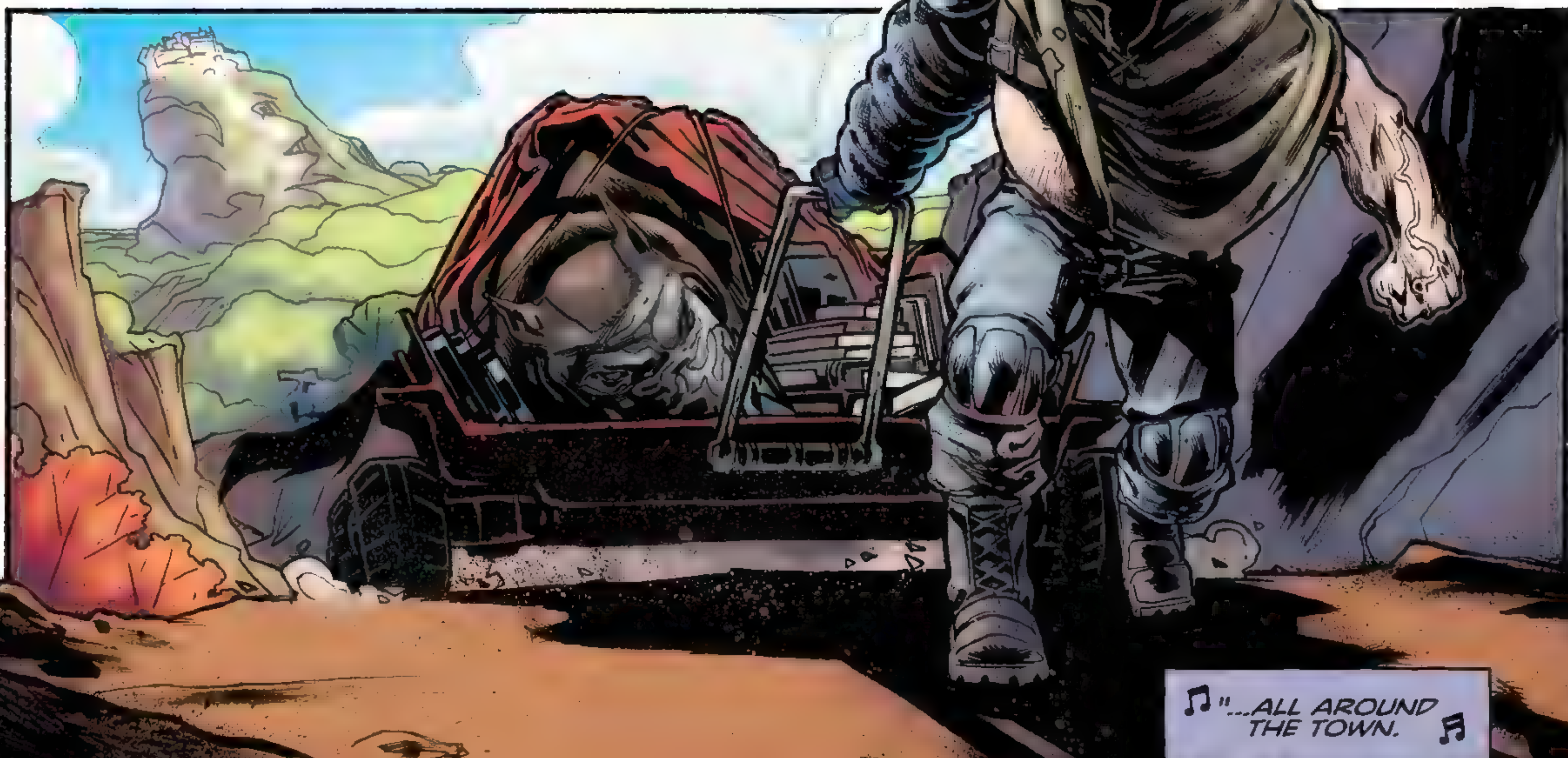
She was a warrior--part beacon light, part arson fire. But now, she says, the people need a FUTURE, not a weapon.

No one really knows how much she gave, how much she LOST, to make all this happen. The mask LIBERATED us, but it CHANGED her. I don't think all those voices, those ghosts, went away entirely.

And so she comes HERE. Every day. The little gravesite she's made for Opal... and she tends it with great care.

And Anzio and I are expecting her for dinner tonight.

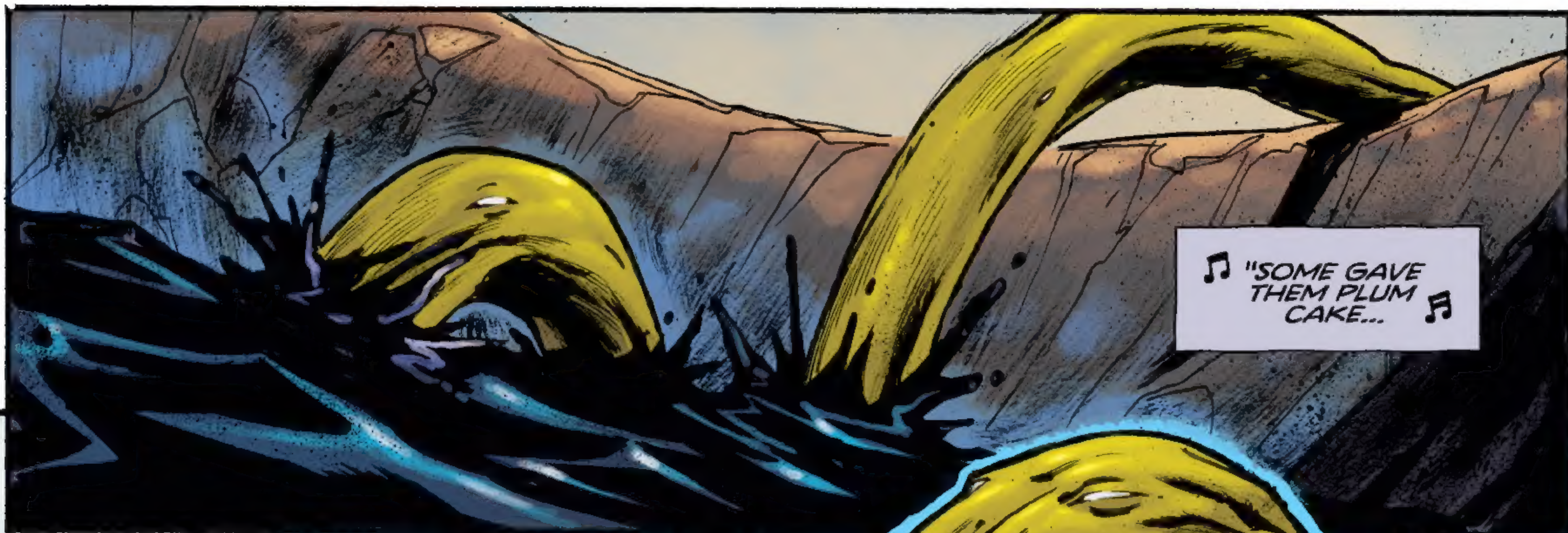




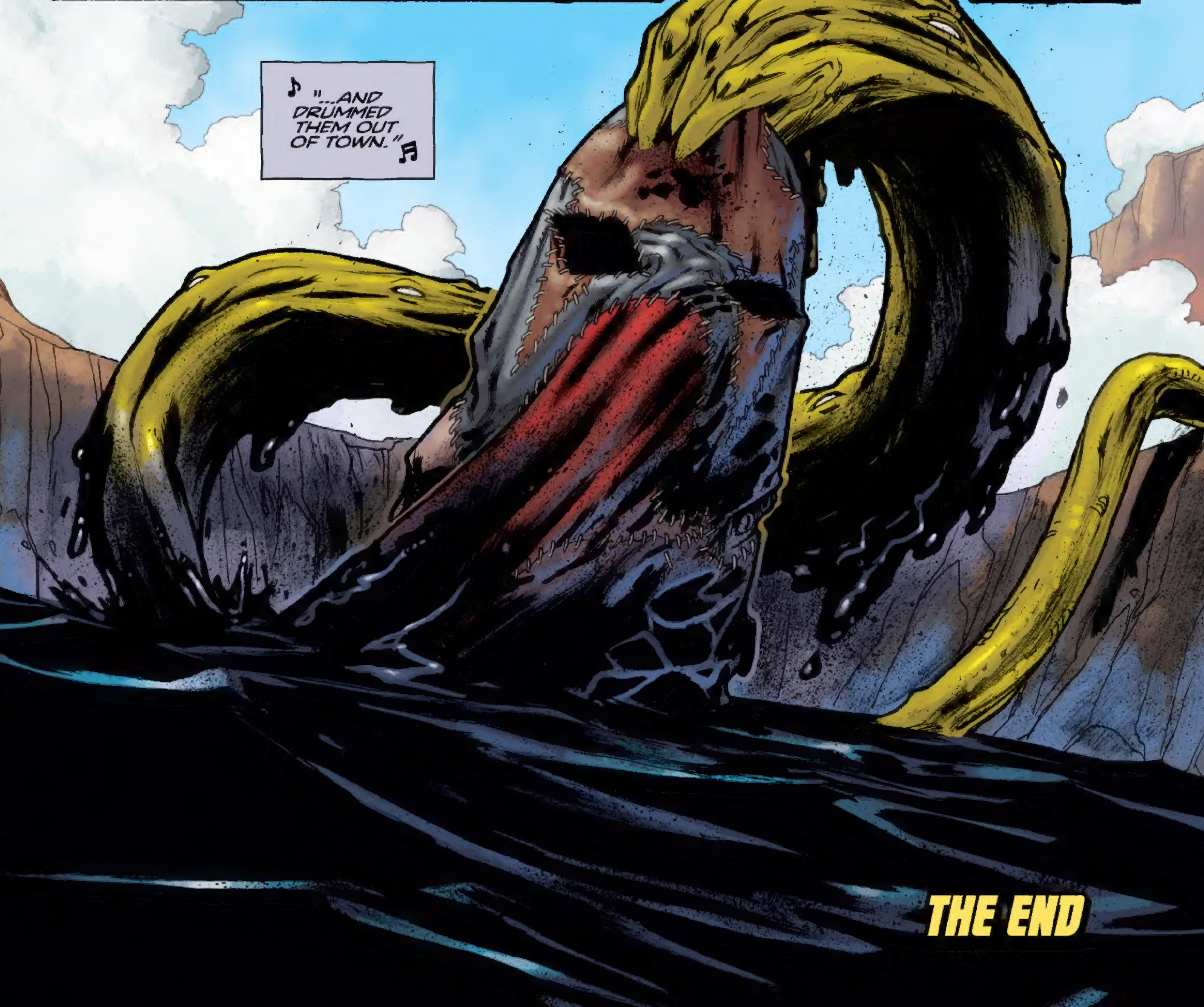




♪ "SOME GAVE  
THEM WHITE  
BREAD, SOME  
GAVE THEM  
BROWN." ♪



♪ "SOME GAVE  
THEM PLUM  
CAKE..." ♪



♪ "...AND  
DRUMMED  
THEM OUT  
OF TOWN." ♪

**THE END**



## AFTERWORD

I DIDN'T CHOOSE TO BE A GUITAR PLAYER. Guitar playing chose me.

As a teen, I dabbled in art and acting. I even thought about being a forest ranger. Something about being a mailman appealed to me as well. Then, I started playing guitar and it felt like a *calling*. Political activism, same deal. I felt a *compulsion* to swing back at the injustice I saw in my hometown—and the world at large. Comic writing too. I had this story, *Orchid*, that just *demand*ed to get out. And here it is.

I feel very fortunate. I think I was *meant* to be a musician, an activist, a writer. And here I am. Why? Well, my mom, a single, public high school teacher, was able to scrape together fifty bucks for my first guitar to unlock that dream. There were books around that stoked the fires of my political determination. And, by the time I wrote *Orchid*, I was a fairly well-known musician and the nice people at Dark Horse took my call.

I think everyone, without exception, deserves to be the person they were meant to be. But, literally, billions of people aren't so lucky. Why? Poverty. Crushing poverty. The next Mozart is likely right now slaving away in an Indonesian sweatshop. The doctor who was meant to cure cancer is instead sweeping the floors of a maquiladora along the Mexican border. Manmade circumstances that deny the essence of who we might be, who we should be, who we were meant to be.

Wrestling with personal demons and societal shackles, *Orchid* and her friends are simply trying to figure out who *they* were meant to be and how the hell they can be it, given the circumstances into which they were born.

The tilted playing field of our world is not so different from *Orchid*'s. Maybe that's why you picked up this

volume. Or maybe it was for the cool monsters. Either way, I'd like to thank you all for coming along on this journey. Fans of the series from all over the globe have been so supportive, and I deeply appreciate it. Thanks to the entire Dark Horse family, especially Dave Land (for the encouragement and confidence), Sierra Hahn (for always being right), Jim Gibbons (my Libertyville brother, who brought it home), and Scott Allie and Mike Richardson, who have helped me realize this story in an uncompromised and uncompromising way. Thanks to Jack Olsen and Anthony Arnone, who gave me invaluable feedback early on. Thanks to Gerard Way for passing my manuscript on to Dark Horse and getting the ball rolling. Thanks to Kevin Mills, Carl Restivo, and the Freedom Fighter Orchestra for assistance in recording *Orchid*'s musical score. And a huge thanks to the creative team: Massimo Carnevale for his dramatic covers, Nate Piekos of Blambot for his care and patience with the lettering, Dan Jackson for the incredible colors that really brought *Orchid*'s world to life, and the unquestionable MVP of the project, Scott Hepburn, whose illustrations have rocketed him to the upper echelon of his craft. Scott has been one of the most talented and pleasant collaborators I've ever had the pleasure of working with in any medium.

And finally, thanks to all the rebels and radicals who—with clear intent and purpose—have stood up in their place and time, against whatever odds, and fought for a better, more just world. Because, I suppose, it was what they were meant to do.

**TOM MORELLO**

An early character sketch of *Orchid* and Yehzu by Scott Hepburn





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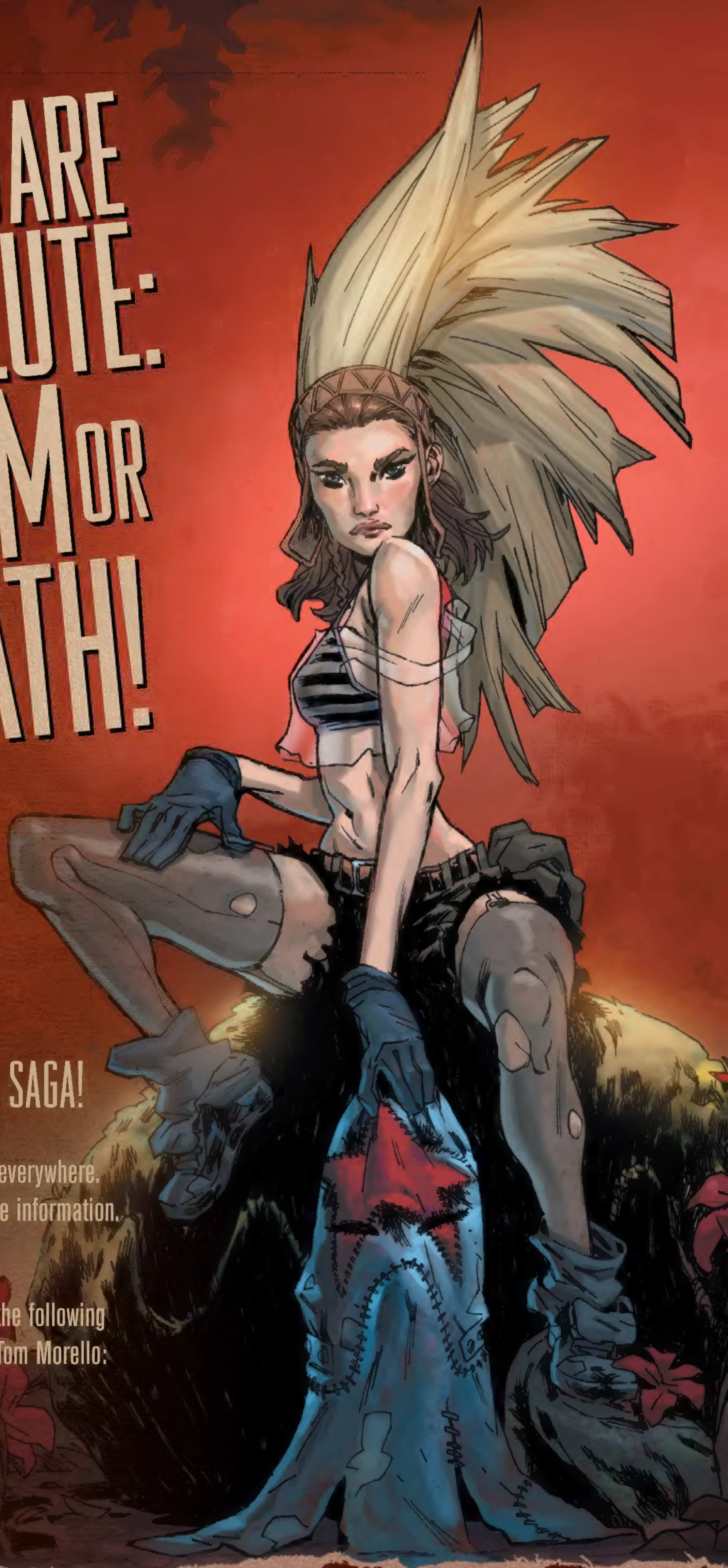
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